

SECTION III-5

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS: Features that support stakeholder groups in implementing and using an ELAS

This chapter includes the research and science that supports Principle #5 and related recommendations. It also offers a sampling of resources that schools and districts might find helpful as they support those who will be implementing and using the early literacy assessment system (ELAS), including district administrators, principals, teachers, policymakers, and students and their families. The content provides some of the relevant explanation and backing for **Principle #5** and associated **Phase III Supporting and Monitoring Recommendations**.

Phase III RECOMMENDATIONS (Principle #5)

Principle #5: The ELAS must be supported and monitored by a sustained program of collaborative, inquiry-based PROFESSIONAL LEARNING and FEEDBACK.

3.1: The **ELAS LEADERSHIP TEAM** should use the logic model and theory of action to develop plans for professional learning and formative evaluation of the ELAS.

To accomplish Recommendation 3.1, the **ELAS LEADERSHIP TEAM**, in collaboration with **PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS**, should:

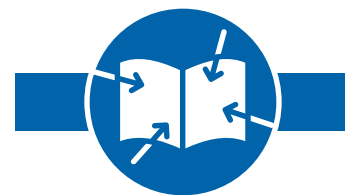
3.2: Gather information about the current level of knowledge and capacity related to literacy, assessment, and professional learning (strengths and gaps) among staff (teachers, administrators, coaches), students and their families, and local policymakers, and use these data to guide the implementation and support of an ELAS.

3.3: Create a cohesive master professional learning plan (aligned to Michigan's *Professional Learning Policy* and associated *Standards for Professional Learning*) to support all stakeholders responsible for early literacy development and assessment. The plan should address early literacy development and assessment and meet the learning needs of children and instructional needs of teachers based on evidence of need as well as research.

3.4: Budget for and plan to provide substantive resources and support for content-focused professional learning about early literacy development and assessment that is collaborative, intensive, sustained, and job-embedded.

3.5: Participate in statewide efforts to prepare, support, and generate teacher leaders and instructional coaches to promote effective early literacy development and assessment practices, with an emphasis on the use of classroom formative assessment practices.

3.6: Develop a plan for formative evaluation of the ELAS that includes ongoing monitoring and feedback from the field about the quality, utility, and effectiveness of the assessment system as it is implemented and becomes operational.



Introduction

A primary and powerful lever for bolstering educators' successful implementation of the recommended early literacy assessment system (ELAS) is a sustained program of collaborative, inquiry-based professional learning that is adequately supported and monitored. Collaborative inquiry provides educators with the necessary structure and processes to refine and adapt their professional knowledge and practices to effectively use assessment information to inform decisions about student literacy needs and to achieve measurable student results (Colton, Langer, & Goff, 2015; Jensen Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull & Hunter, 2016; Timperley, & Halbert, 2014). Engagement in inquiry builds educators' capacity to diagnose, adapt, and solve daily challenges they face in their work. When such professional learning is planned, implemented, and evaluated effectively, it also is an essential strategy for advancing equity. Educators engaged in inquiry not only deepen their content knowledge and pedagogy, but also increase their understanding of students' culture, language, and background—and their impact on assessment—and how to use assessment information to guide their future actions.

Educators, however, are not the only stakeholder group who could benefit from a thoughtful approach to professional learning. Students and their families also play an active role in assessment and can benefit from the information (data) that derives from assessment. Policymakers at the local, regional, and state levels also influence assessment policies and resource allocation, and they use assessment data to inform their decisions. Consequently, it's important to include them in any review of the district's current knowledge and capacity regarding assessment tools and practices and the appropriate use of assessment data.

This review of the district's human capacity regarding literacy development and assessment tools and practices is not meant to be exhaustive, nor should it resemble either an evaluation or a simple checklist. Rather it is about developing shared understanding about where the district has assets and where growth will be needed in order to accomplish the goal of implementing and supporting an effective ELAS.

District leaders need to know where various groups of people are starting on the ELAS journey. Through surveys, anecdotes, and dialogue, they can discover what foundational knowledge, skills, and dispositions the learning community brings to this effort and where it will need additional guidance.

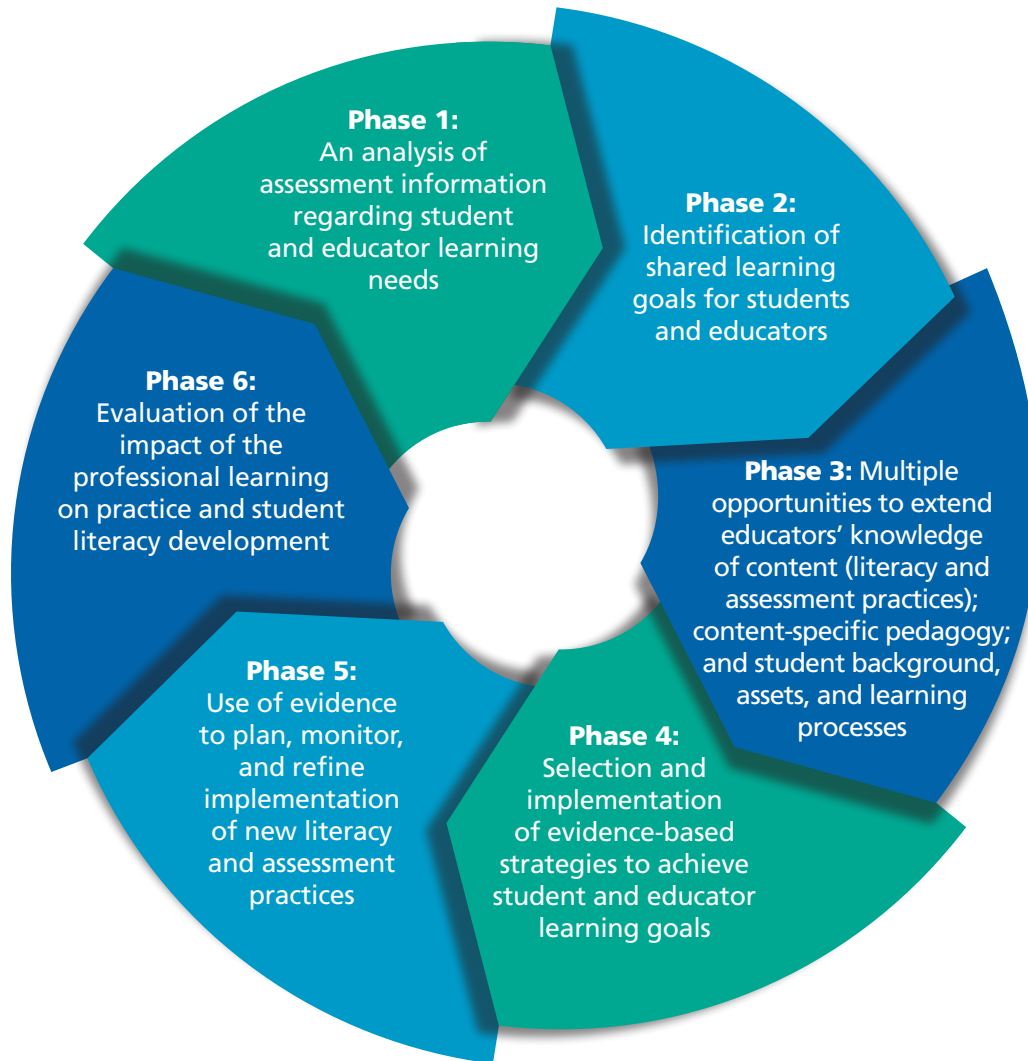
Six phases of collaborative inquiry

The collaborative inquiry cycle is a systematic and recursive process for educators, as learners, to explore issues or wonderings about their practice and the literacy learning of those they teach or lead (principle/teacher, teacher/student, etc.). The process enables learners to determine evidence-based resolutions through dialogue, analysis of assessment, new learning, experimentation and reflection. Their inquiry is driven by the system's vision of assessment and literacy practice. The inquiry process aligns with assessment literacies—the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed by educators to effectively use assessment tools and practices and create assessment systems that support their students' literacy development.

This continuous improvement approach to professional learning meets educators' learning needs while simultaneously cultivating a culture of collective responsibility for student success. The continuous application of collaborative inquiry cycles aligns educators' learning with student needs and expected literacy learning outcomes and standards.

Collaborative inquiry consists of six phases, each of which informs the next phase or raises questions that require going back to an earlier phase.

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● **FIGURE III.5.1**
Collaborative inquiry consists of six phases.



An online learning module from the Michigan Assessment Consortium (MAC) entitled “Collaborative Inquiry” provides an overview of the collaborative inquiry process and how it ties to the Michigan Assessment Literacy Standards (see *Resources & Tools* at the end of this chapter).

Six driving assumptions of collaborative inquiry

Collaborative inquiry as a powerful approach to professional learning for addressing early literacy development and assessment rests on **six driving assumptions**:

1. Professional learning is an active process.
2. Professional learning allows for educator agency.
3. Professional learning is relevant and content specific.
4. Professional learning is best situated in cultures of collaboration.
5. Professional learning is sustained.
6. Professional learning requires organizational systems and structures of support.

Each assumption is described in detail in the following text.

Assumption 1: Professional learning is an active process

Learning is the process through which experience causes a permanent change in knowledge and behavior (Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2012). *“Learning is constructed through a process of engagement, analysis and reflection...”* (Killion, 2019, p. 5). *“For lasting changes in behavior to occur, beliefs and assumptions must be brought to consciousness and the deep structures supporting behaviors must be addressed”* (Guerra & Nelson, 2009). Such transformative learning only happens when individuals experience dissonance between the beliefs they hold and what they are experiencing (Mezirow, 1995). Transformative learning is particularly critical in contexts where educators are supporting literacy learning of students whose cultural backgrounds, language, or gender identity are different from those of the educators. Since this kind of dissonance rarely occurs in the normal course of an educator’s day, educators need to engage in learning designs that intentionally interrupt their current ways of viewing their practice and student learning. Collaborative inquiry is such an intervention.

Collaborative inquiry integrates multiple active learning designs that assist the adult learner in *“moving beyond comprehension of the surface features of a new idea or [literacy or assessment] practice to developing a more complete understanding of its purposes, critical attributes, meaning, and connection to other approaches”* (Learning Forward, 2011). Darling-Hammond, Hyster, & Gardner (2017, p. 7) consider active learning an *“umbrella element that often incorporates the elements of collaboration, coaching, feedback, and reflection, and the use of models and modeling.”* Providing time for practice is also key to the implementation of new practices.

Assumption 2: Professional learning allows for educator agency

Agency, or ownership, enables educators to drive the focus of their learning, the ways in which learning occurs, and how they evaluate the impact of their learning (Learning Forward, 2011). Agency requires clarity of purpose about expectations and a method for measuring progress toward those expectations. This is why it is important to monitor and assess the success of teachers and administrators in acquiring and applying literacy assessment practices. Agency empowers and intrinsically motivates educators to pursue continuous improvement and support colleagues. Educators are in the driver’s seat when engaged in collaborative inquiry around literacy and assessment knowledge and practice.

Assumption 3: Professional learning is relevant and content-specific

When educators engage in professional learning that is guided by specific student learning needs, is content-specific, and involves cycles of inquiry into educators’ problems of practice, substantial positive influences on teachers’ practice and student achievement result. (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001; Jensen et al., 2016; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss & Shapley, 2007). The most effective professional learning for educators occurs when the focus is on the concrete, everyday challenges involved in the teaching and learning of *specific* curriculum content (e.g., literacy development, pedagogy, and assessment literacy). This makes the learning relevant to the learner. Halbert & Kaser (2016) write *“rather than relying on generalized solutions, [inquiry] places contextual evidence*

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and analysis at the center of focused change efforts” (p. 11). Scanlon, Gelzheiser, Vellutino, Schatschneider, & Sweeny, (2008) found that teachers who received professional learning focused on specific literacy content, tools, and instructional strategies significantly increased their effectiveness and improved performance levels of students’ literacy. This approach to professional learning is in stark contrast to a focus on general principles of teaching or generic teaching practices that are taken out of context (Aspen Institute, 2018; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Learning Forward, 2019). Timperley et al., (2014) describes the centrality of collaborative inquiry in the lives of educators:

“Motivation and energy build, as educators together find compelling reasons to change what they are doing, and as they take joint responsibility for doing so. As they engage in deeper forms of inquiry, the process becomes central to their professional lives. They will not, in fact they cannot, go back to earlier, unquestioning ways of doing things” (p. 6).

Assumption 4: Professional learning is best situated in cultures of collaboration

According to DuFour & Matton (2013) and Darling-Hammond et.al. (2009), “the most productive environments seem to be those in which [educators] regularly interact and engage in positive and productive collegial conversations around meaningful and relevant issues (as cited in Colton et al., 2015, p. 49). Love, Stiles, Mundry, & DiRanna, (2008) add that “dialogue is a central process of the [inquiry cycle] because it invites multiple interpretations, helps teachers examine limiting assumptions, and unleashes teachers’ creativity and expertise” (as cited in Colton et al., 2015). Effective communication becomes possible through intentional facilitation. Collaboration, however, does not happen automatically. It involves developing working agreements and communication skills. Teacher leaders often serve in this role. They ensure that working agreements are followed and that teachers develop the communication and analytical skills they need to stay focused while studying their practice and student learning.

As educators work together to solve problems of practice around literacy, they draw on the diverse understanding and expertise of group members and others within and outside of the district. Collaborative learning holds everyone accountable and builds collective responsibility for the literacy success of every student and educator within and across schools. This is especially possible when leaders learn side by side with their staff. The distribution of knowledge and skills also results in collective efficacy. Collective efficacy is defined as “shared belief in [the group’s] conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment” (Bandura, 1977). Rachel Eells’ (2011) meta-analysis of studies related to collective efficacy and achievement in education demonstrate that the beliefs teachers hold about the ability of the school as a whole are positively associated with student achievement across subject areas. On the basis of Eells’ research, John Hattie (2016) positioned collective efficacy at the top of the list of factors that influence student achievement.

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Joellen Killion's workbook, *Establishing Time for Professional Learning* (2013), “guides districts and schools as they develop, vet, and implement recommendations for increasing collaborative learning time for educators, and then evaluate the effectiveness of the change” (p. 10). A second workbook, *Professional Learning Policy Review: A Workbook for States and Districts* (Killion, 2013), provides states and districts with guidance to conduct a review of existing policies related to professional learning. Killion & Hirsh (2012) discuss how districts can analyze their investments in professional learning.

Assumption 5: Professional learning is sustained

Just as it takes time for students to learn complex curriculum, educators need time to acquire new knowledge, skills, dispositions, and behavior to effectively use assessment tools and practices that support their students' literacy development. Educators need time to learn, practice, be coached, analyze, and reflect on the results; have someone help them to understand the ideas more deeply; and then try it again, repeating as necessary. Research indicates that the intensity and duration of professional learning is related to the degree of teacher change (Desimone et al., 2002). The exact length of time to support teacher and student achievement has not been defined. It could take upwards of 50 hours of intensive professional learning to realize results for students (Learning Forward, 2011). This is why it is important to engage educators in continuous cycles of inquiry. It should be noted that *“the effectiveness and importance of duration is dependent upon the quality, design and focus of the content and activities that comprise the professional learning effort”* (Swayer & Stuke, 2019). Collaborative inquiry provides the necessary structures and processes for sustaining educators' learning around assessment use and literacy development.

Assumption 6: Professional learning requires organizational systems and structures of support

It is impossible to reap the full benefit of collaborative inquiry without organizational systems and structures to support effective professional learning for continuous improvement. Leaders across the school district need to operate as a team to plan, implement, and manage a professional learning system with measures for success. Thus, the team needs to clarify expectations and goals regarding literacy and assessment knowledge, skills and practices and professional learning. In so doing, they communicate that there is an important link between professional and student learning.

Professional learning requires substantive support and resources to achieve its goals as stated in **Recommendation 3.4:** *Budget for and plan to provide substantive resources and support for content-focused professional learning about early literacy development and assessment that is collaborative, intensive, sustained, and job-embedded.*

A district's leadership team needs to increase the staff's capacity to engage collaboratively; provide adequate time for collaborative team learning; and establish ongoing support for implementation of new practice in the classroom (Jensen, 2016; Learning Forward, 2011). A major challenge to collaborative inquiry identified by educators is time. The district's school board needs to adopt policies related to district calendars and school schedules that support collaborative learning during the workday.

The notable change in language from professional development to professional learning used in this Guide is intentional. It represents a shift from learning that is done **to** educators, to learning that actually *transforms* how educators think and act. *“By making learning the focus, those who are responsible for professional learning will concentrate their efforts on assuring that learning for educators leads to learning for students”* (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 13).

The vision provided of sustained, collaborative inquiry-based professional learning is captured in various forms in the following documents:

- Michigan’s definition and standards for professional learning
- The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) definition of professional development
- The *Essential Coaching Practices in Elementary Literacy; Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy; and Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3* (MAISA/GELN/ELTF, 2016)

Portrait connection

The **Portraits** in Section II of this Guide depict three teachers’ intentional and effective application of shared knowledge about literacy assessment, curriculum, and instruction to effectively respond to the unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds, assets, and literacy needs of their students. Although the Portraits don’t explicitly describe the professional learning the teachers experienced, it is worthwhile to pause and consider the scenario described in the sidebar below of how the teachers might have developed their literacy and assessment expertise through collaborative inquiry.

A detailed account of Ms. Jones’ first-grade team as they engage in each phase of the inquiry cycle to increase their skills in assessing and developing students’ reading fluency is provided in the illustrative section **Collaborative Inquiry in Action** that begins on page 121. In that illustration, you’ll notice that each phase of the cycle presents a guiding question that drives the continuous learning process. Questions stimulate teachers’ curiosity, which is a powerful motivator for learning.

The primary goals for professional learning are changes in educator practice and increases in student learning. This is a process that occurs over time with substantive support for implementation, so educators consistently embed their new learning into practice. Full and effective implementation of new practices is possible when those responsible for professional learning follow **Recommendation 3.3:** *Create a cohesive master professional learning plan (aligned to Michigan’s Professional Learning Policy and associated Standards for Professional Learning) to support all stakeholders responsible for early literacy development and assessment. The plan should address early literacy development and assessment and meet the learning needs of children and instructional needs of teachers based on evidence of need as well as research.*

ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIO OF COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY EXPERIENCES OF PORTRAIT TEACHERS

The district leaders and community members, including families, establish early literacy as an improvement goal, clearly communicate the goal to all district educators and the community, implement essential professional learning conditions, and establish a procedure for monitoring and supporting application of assessment literacy practices. An altered calendar and school schedule are approved by the school board to provide every educator in the district time during the workday to engage in high-quality professional learning.

During the teachers’ designated daily planning time they engage in facilitated and systematic cycles of inquiry into the effectiveness of practice for student engagement for literacy learning. Teacher leaders, including instructional coaches build team members’ collaborative skills and support individual and team learning and the implementation of new practices in the teachers’ classrooms. District leaders support, monitor, and evaluate implementation of professional learning to ensure changes in educator practices.

Conclusion

Professional learning is a strategy that “is available to almost every educator, and—when planned and implemented [and evaluated] correctly—ensures that educators acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to help more students meet standards” (Hirsh, 2018). Collaborative inquiry enables educators to drive the focus of their learning, the ways in which learning occurs, and how they evaluate the impact of their learning (Learning Forward, 2011). As educators engage in cycles of collaborative inquiry, they develop an inquiry stance—continuously wondering how they can make a difference for their learners’ literacy development using assessment and literacy practices.

As described by Anderson (1984), Berliner (1986), and Colton & Sparks-Langer (1993):

“Maintaining an inquiry stance allows [educators] to make judgments based on thoughtful analysis, problem solving, experimentation, and assessment. Through the inquiry process, [educators] continually transform their beliefs, improve their analytical thinking skills, and develop a rich and well-organized knowledge base that allows them to think through situations and make difficult decisions in the heat of the moment” (as cited in Colton et al., 2015, p. 33). Collaborative inquiry provides a professional learning approach with the power and a track record for permanently changing the literacy and assessment practices of teachers and leaders so they can create new solutions to complex problems to support literacy development of all students.



Professional Learning Plans: A Workbook for States, Districts, and Schools (Killion, 2013) provides educators with a step-by-step guide for completing a professional learning plan. The plan should be integrated into the logic model and the formative evaluation of the ELAS as indicated in **Recommendation 3.1: The ELAS LEADERSHIP TEAM should use the logic model and theory of action to develop plans for professional learning and formative evaluation of the ELAS.**

COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY IN ACTION

INTRODUCTION

This illustrative scenario of collaborative inquiry in action highlights **a team of first-grade teachers** studying their problems of practice around fluency; however, it's important to note that school and district leaders can experience equal levels of impact from such cycles of inquiry. Although leaders may not need to know as much about literacy as their teachers, the principal in the scenario chooses to learn beside the team. The principal also meets with her learning team to deepen her understanding of how to manage change so she can provide the necessary conditions to support the teachers' learning. Just as teachers have a class of students, education leaders have a class of teachers or others with whom they work.

As you read the scenario, note that each phase of the collaborative inquiry cycle involves evidence, learning, and action.

Phase 1: Analysis of assessment information to identify student and educator learning needs

What's going on for learners?

During phase 1 of the collaborative inquiry cycle, team members, with the principal, analyze data about students, educators, and systems to identify student learning needs and goals. A comprehensive analysis of data helps the team avoid exerting large amounts of energy in solving the wrong problem. *"Focusing on students' learning needs also reinforces for teachers that the primary purpose for participating in professional learning is to enhance those student outcomes that are valued by the community within which the students live and learn...Outcomes for students become the reason for teachers to engage in professional learning"* (Timperley, 2011).

It is mid-November and Ms. Jones' first-grade team meets to talk about a handful of students in each of their classrooms that has demonstrated little progress in reading fluency. Teachers have come to value the power of collective learning for addressing problems of practice. A teacher leader from the school leads the team in a comprehensive analysis of an array of student data to increase the team's comfort, competence, and confidence in analyzing the data brought to the meeting.

The teachers analyze the students' running records, noting rate data, as well as the expression with which the students have read. The teachers also share anecdotal notes taken during the students' guided reading. Members use probing questions to identify potential root causes for the students' struggles, while also making note of the students' strengths. They have learned to draw on students' assets to build additional literacy skills. As the teachers analyze the wealth of evidence in front of them, they consider whether the students are struggling with accuracy, automaticity, or prosody—all different aspects of fluency. Ultimately, the team decides their students are struggling most with prosody.

Most of their students seem to struggle with expression, they read word-by-word instead of in phrases or chunks, and they fail to use intonation or pauses to “mark” punctuation (e.g., periods, commas, and question marks). As they analyze the data, additional questions about the performance of individuals surface, such as “I wonder if Joe’s struggle with intonation and expression is due to a hearing problem?” and “Perhaps Sue has never been taught about punctuation marks.”

The teacher leader charts the questions raised for the teachers to see. She also makes notes in her journal about the teachers’ increasing curiosity. The teachers agree to collect additional evidence before the next study group in order to inform their remaining questions before moving forward. At their next session, teachers bring answers to the questions and engage in additional dialogue to verify that the main challenge is helping students with intonation and expression.

After analyzing the student data, the teachers identify their own learning needs around teaching intonation and expression. The teacher leader engages Ms. Jones’ team in studying both the literature on fluency and their current practice. They spend time studying the *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K to 3* (MAISA/GELN/ELTF, 2016) and other relevant literature to determine what the research says about teaching prosody. The teacher leader asks team members to share what they currently do to build students’ capacity to read with intonation, phrasing, and expression. As team members talk about their current knowledge and practices, they begin to discover gaps in their professional knowledge base.

The principal assigns one of her teacher leaders to each of the school’s grade-level teams to help members build their skills in collaboration, data analysis, and engagement in the phases of collaborative inquiry. Fortunately, each school in the district has a cadre of teacher leaders to draw on because the district followed **Recommendation 3.5:** *Participate in statewide efforts to prepare, support, and generate teacher leaders and instructional coaches to promote effective early literacy development and assessment practices, with an emphasis on the use of classroom formative assessment practices.*



Two statewide efforts to support teacher leaders that districts can consider include: Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME), and the *Literacy Essentials* series. Another resource, *A Systemic Approach to Elevating Teacher Leadership* (Killion, Harrison, Colton, Bryan, Delehant, & Cooke, 2016), can be useful for districts that wish to initiate or review and revise their approach to teacher leadership within schools or school systems.

Phase 2: Identification of shared learning goals for students and educators

Where will concentrating our energies make the most difference?

Ms. Jones’ team understands that “data-based decision making is key to ensuring [they] set the right [professional learning] goals, establish the appropriate learning targets, and accurately measure progress” (Hirsh & Crow, 2018). With a shared understanding of what is going on for learners, the team focuses its attention on what teachers can do differently to change the experiences and outcomes for their

learners. The established student and educator learning goals become the focus of the team’s inquiry and will guide their collective learning and actions.

Student learning goal:

By the end of the next six weeks, each of the identified students will demonstrate an increase in reading with expression. The teacher will collect four oral reading samples and make a holistic judgment about whether the sample was always, almost always, or rarely read with expression.

Teacher learning goal:

Teachers will increase their capacity to build students’ prosody by identifying two new strategies and integrating their new learning into their guided reading program.

Phase 3: Multiple opportunities to extend educators’ professional knowledge

How will we engage in learning to achieve desired outcomes for both ourselves and our students?

With a clear focus and a deep understanding of what is causing their students’ struggle with fluency, the team answers the following question: “How and where will we learn more about what to do differently?” Although all six phases of collaborative inquiry cycle lead to learning, this phase and the remaining ones are specifically designed to extend educators’ knowledge of content (literacy and assessment); content-specific pedagogy for facilitating literacy development; students’ background, assets, and learning processes; and how to monitor implementation of their new practices. Timperley and her colleagues (2014) write: *“This phase is critically important because better outcomes for learners are a result of teachers and leaders acquiring new knowledge and developing new skills that lead to new actions.”* Without this new knowledge, *“inquiry can result in process without substance”* (Timperley, 2011).

During this phase the team, with the help of the teacher leader, conducts a thorough review of relevant research and evidence about different practices and principles that hold promise for improving fluency. As each new idea is reviewed, members consider how it might be better than what they were previously doing. The team identifies a few different strategies they want to learn more about and try with their students, including Readers Theater and repeated, echo, and choral reading. These evidence-based practices become the content of the team’s professional learning.

With the focus of their learning identified, the team plans how they will accomplish their learning goal. Planning and designing professional learning for changes in educator practice require a sequence of learning designs as educators move from developing new knowledge and skills to implementing the change effectively. Some learning designs build educators’ knowledge base. Some are more effective for developing educators’ skills. Other designs support educators as they use their new skills in the workplace. With a well-designed plan, the team sets off on its learning journey.



The **student learning goal** identified by Ms. Jones’ defines equitable expectations for all students to achieve at high levels and holds teachers responsible for implementing appropriate strategies to support student learning. Learning for educators that focuses on student learning outcomes has a positive effect on changing educator practice and increasing student achievement.



Selecting appropriate learning designs

requires understanding about all the following:

- learners' characteristics
- goals of the professional learning,
- conditions in which the learning occurs.

Knowledge about the wide range of available learning designs facilitates the decision-making process. Lois Easton's book *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (2015) provides an array of designs to choose from. The book features only learning designs that result in educators' active engagement in learning.

First, Ms. Jones' team attends a half-day workshop on building students' fluency hosted by the intermediate school district. They picked this program because it includes instruction on Readers Theater. During a follow-up session, the team is invited to observe a first-grade teacher in another school using Readers Theater with her students. The team previews the lesson with the teacher prior to the observation and then reflects on what they saw with the teacher afterwards. The conversation with the first-grade teacher helps the team move beyond a surface-level grasp of Reading Theater to a more complete understanding of its purpose, critical attributes, meaning, and connections to other approaches such as echo and choral reading.

With a foundational understanding of Readers Theater, the literacy coach engages teachers in a professional learning design called "lesson study." *"Lesson study is a complex process, supported by collaborative goal-setting, careful data collection on student learning, and protocols that enable productive discussion of sensitive issues"* (Lewis, 2015). Together, members of the team plan a lesson using Readers Theater. One member of the team teaches the lesson while others gather evidence of student learning and development. The team discusses the evidence gathered during the lesson, using it to improve the lesson. The revised lesson is taught in another classroom and observed by the group and discussed. During the lesson study, the literacy coach notices that the teachers' knowledge of content, pedagogy, and student thinking around developing students' prosody is deepening.

Phase 4: Selection and implementation of evidence-based strategies

What can we do differently to make enough of a difference?

Nothing will change for the learners unless the teachers do things differently as a result of their new learning. It is not until the new learning is implemented fully that team members really know whether the new strategy will or will not lead to the intended student outcomes. It is rare that the initial implementation of a new strategy goes as planned. Timperley and her colleagues (2014) suggest that taking action is a team sport. *"Usually we have to try something out in action, reflect on how it went (did it make enough of a difference), have someone help us to understand the ideas more deeply, and then try it out again"* (p. 17).

With new learning under their belts, Ms. Jones' team members begin to design lessons independent of one another using Readers Theater, and echo and choral reading. The team members share their plans during one of their planning meetings. They share their intended learning targets and success criteria. They identify how they will assess their students' progress and use the evidence of student learning to improve students' understanding of the intended fluency outcomes. Before leaving

the planning session, each teacher also identifies what evidence (i.e., next oral reading sample) they will gather and bring to the group to show their students' progress. Finally, the teachers leave and implement their planned lessons.

After several days they audio-record the next oral reading sample from their students, and the team analyzes the students' performances. Each member shares their perspective about why individual students may or may not be progressing. As they unpack this information, teachers adjust their practice to meet the latest learning challenges. A few team members engage in more workshops to develop a deeper understanding of how to integrate the new practices into their guided reading sessions.

In addition to designing and implementing lessons, the literacy coach schedules individual coaching sessions with teachers to support their continued implementation of Readers Theater. The literacy coach understands that educators need time to select an appropriate practice, try it out, be coached on it, analyze and reflect on the results, have someone help them to understand the ideas more deeply, then try it again, repeating as necessary.

Phase 5: Use of evidence to plan, monitor, and refine implementation of new practices

What is working, how do we know, and what needs to change?

The ultimate goal of cycles of inquiry in support of an ELAS is to make a difference to valued literacy outcomes for learners. Changes in practice do not always lead to significant improvement. As experienced in Phase IV, Ms. Jones' team members monitor progress against established literacy benchmarks to identify what needs to be refocused and refined and what more needs to be learned.

Team members use the formative assessment process, which is one of the most powerful forms of assessment, daily during instruction. They bring recordings of the students' reading to share and analyze with their colleagues. Team members develop and use common assessments. Additionally, members of the team use data collected at the school level to reflect on their implementation of new instructional approaches.

The leadership collects data using such processes as classroom walkthroughs, teacher observations, performance reviews, and video-recordings of instruction. This information is shared with the team to aid in the process of monitoring effectiveness and making adjustments.



Permanent changes in educator assessment and literacy practices

are possible when educators take informed actions and there is sustained implementation support over time. Findings from Joyce's and Showers' (1982) seminal research indicates that implementation of professional learning that is reinforced by ongoing coaching increases the implementation of new practices by 60 percent. Michigan's *Essential Coaching Practices for Elementary Literacy* (MAISA/GELN/ELTF, 2016) identifies the critical qualifications, dispositions, activities, and roles of effective literacy coaches.

In addition, research indicates that there is a direct relationship between the duration of professional learning and the degree of teacher change (Desimone et al., 2002). It can take upwards of 50 hours of intensive professional learning to realize measurable results for students (Learning Forward, 2011).



Frequent assessment of progress provides the team timely feedback (Killion, 2019), which guides refinements in and accelerates implementation of new practices. Colton et al., (2015) found that when elementary teachers regularly analyzed student work of struggling learners with their team members, students' reading levels and writing skills significantly increased.

"When teachers, for example, design assessments and scoring guides and engage in collaborative analysis of student work, they gain crucial information about the effect of their learning on students" (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 29).

Phase 6: Evaluation of the impact of the professional learning

What impact has our professional learning had on student achievement?

In this final phase, the team determines the degree of success of student learning experienced as a result of the learning and implementation stage. The team collects another set of running records, analyzes the results, and compares these results with previous ones.

The teachers are delighted to see that most of the students who were struggling are now on track with their fluency. Readers Theater, as well as echo and choral reading, seem to be effective strategies for building the students' fluency. The team, however, is concerned about the few who are still struggling. They decide to analyze the running records of those students to figure out what their next area of inquiry might be.



Evaluating the effectiveness of professional learning and demonstrating its impact on student achievement is important. *Assessing Impact: Evaluating Professional Learning* (Killion, 2018) guides administrators, professional learning leaders, continuous improvement teams, and evaluators through a step-by-step results-based assessment of professional learning.

Assessment of the impact of professional learning should happen at two levels of the system:

- **On a large scale**, those responsible for professional learning in the district should evaluate their programs and link professional learning to student learning. Such an evaluation helps teachers, service providers, and leaders improve their programs.
- **At the classroom level**, teachers should use summative assessment information to determine whether the team is making enough of a difference in the learning of the students. Also, they should make on-going use of the formative assessment process, embedded in daily instruction, to monitor student learning and adjust instruction as necessary to measure and improve student achievement.

Tools/Resources for PHASE III:



A Systemic Approach to Elevating Teacher Leadership (Learning Forward, 2016)

This 24-page paper can be useful for districts who wish to initiate or review and revise the approach to teacher leadership within schools or school systems.

Available at learningforward.org/docs/default-source/pdf/a-systemic-approach-to-elevating-teacher-leadership.pdf.

Analyze and Plan Professional Learning Investments (Learning Forward, 2012)

This chart and checklist help educators structure discussions and reflections about resource use.

learningforward.org/docs/february-2012/tool331.pdf?sfvrsn=2

Assessing Impact: Evaluating Professional Learning, third edition (Corwin, 2017)

This book by Joellen Killion guides administrators, professional learning leaders, continuous improvement teams, and evaluators through a step-by-step, results-based assessment of the impact of professional learning on educator effectiveness and student achievement.

Available for purchase online.

Collaborative Inquiry (Michigan Assessment Consortium/Learning Forward, 2019)

This online, self-paced learning module explores collaborative inquiry and is one of a set of foundational assessment learning modules that provide an opportunity for engagement, reflection, and access to tools and other resources that can continue to support professional learning.

www.michiganassessmentconsortium.org/almodules

Establishing Time for Collaborative Professional Learning (Killion, 2013)

This 96-page workbook available from Learning Forward guides districts and schools as they develop, vet, and implement recommendations for increasing collaborative learning time for educators, and then evaluate the effectiveness of the change.

Available at <https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/establishing-time-for-professional-learning.pdf>.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and Professional Learning (Learning Forward)

U.S. federal education law (ESSA) includes many provisions that influence how educators experience professional learning. This web page hosted by Learning Forward includes a definition of professional learning as reflected in ESSA and related resources.

learningforward.org/get-involved/essa

Literacy Essentials series (MAISA/GELN/ELTF, 2016)

This set of documents, mentioned earlier in this Guide, incorporate essential practices that support sustained, collaborative, job-embedded professional learning.

All are available at literacyessentials.org.

Essential Coaching Practices in Elementary Literacy

A set of research-supported literacy coaching practices that can be used to provide powerful job-embedded, ongoing professional development while enhancing literacy instruction through teacher expertise. (Intended to be partnered with the Essential Practices in Early Literacy K to 3 and other Literacy Essentials documents.)

Essential School-Wide and Center-Wide Practices in Literacy

These systematic and effective practices can be implemented at the organizational level in education and care settings to help children become proficient in reading.

Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Grades K-3

Professional development throughout the state can focus on this set of ten research-supported literacy instructional practices for daily use in the classroom.

Literacy Essentials: Online Modules

A series of online professional learning modules to help guide educators on the Essential Practices for Early Literacy.

Formative Assessment for Michigan Educators (FAME)

FAME is a professional learning initiative sponsored by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) that promotes teacher collaboration and planning for effective formative assessment practice. It represents one source of support for a district's teacher leaders.

Learn more at www.FAMEMichigan.org.

Michigan Assessment Literacy Standards (MAC, 2016)

Endorsed by the Michigan Board of Education in 2016, the Assessment Literacy Standards provide a common framework to assist K-12 educators, students, families, and policymakers in becoming more knowledgeable about assessment purposes and uses. Standards are available for policymakers, district- and building-level administrators, teachers, and students and their families.

View or download at www.MichiganAssessmentConsortium.org/assessment-literacy-standards.

Assessment Learning Modules

The MAC's self-paced online learning modules are aligned to Michigan's Assessment Literacy Standards and can be accessed individually or as a series. The modules support sound assessment policy and professional learning in high-quality assessment practices. Nine modules are currently available addressing a range of assessment topics, including the Collaborative Inquiry process.

Modules are available at www.michiganassessmentconsortium.org/almodules.

Michigan’s Professional Learning Policy (MDE, 2012)

Professional Learning Policy Available at www.michigan.gov/documents/ProfDevStdsVISWStrategies_4_9_03_C61067__A62638_12_09_02_62686_7.pdf

Michigan’s Professional Learning Policy: Standards for Professional Learning

Available at www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/PL_Standards_2012_.pdf_11_7_12_470728_7.pdf.

Powerful Designs for Professional Learning, third edition (Learning Forward, 2015)

Lois Easton’s book provides an array of professional learning designs that result in educators’ active engagement in learning.

Available at learningforward.org.

Professional Learning Plans: A Workbook for States, Districts and Schools

This 155-page workbook written by Learning Forward offers information and tools to walk educators through seven planning steps, from data analysis to setting goals to identifying learning designs to monitoring the impact of professional learning.

Available at learningforward.org/docs/default-source/commoncore/professional-learning-plans.pdf?sfvrsn=4

Professional Learning Policy Review: A Workbook for States and Districts (Learning Forward, 2013)

This 85-page workbook by Joellen Killion provides states and local school districts with guidance to conduct a review of existing policies related to professional learning.

Available at www.learningforward.org/docs/default-source/commoncore/professionallearningpolicyreview.pdf

The bottom line on excellence: A Guide to Investing in Professional Learning that Increases Educator Performance and Student Results (Killion and Hirsh, 2012)

This article presents a list of principles that will guide districts and schools in allocating and assessing resources in professional learning.

Available at <https://learningforward.org/docs/february-2012/killion331.pdf?sfvrsn=2>.

A listing of all Tools and Resources mentioned in this Guide to help you develop an early literacy assessment system (ELAS) is available online at www.MichiganAssessmentConsortium.org/ELAS.



Assessment literacy is needed among multiple stakeholders so that educators at all levels have the knowledge and support structures to implement assessment systems that improve literacy achievement for all of Michigan's children.

