



**RESEARCH BRIEF**

# The Multiple Roles of School-Based Specialized Literacy Professionals

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***There is a need for specialized literacy professionals to work collaboratively with students, teachers, school administrators, and community members to ensure achievement for all students.***

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**T**oday's schools face complex and difficult challenges. Classrooms are diverse; they are filled with students who require differentiation, given their diverse backgrounds and needs (e.g., specific learning disabilities, autism, English learners, gifted/highly able). Further, with the challenges of the 21st century requiring students to be prepared to function in a highly technological and global society—to be college and career ready—come very high expectations for advanced literacy competence. Moreover, although there is a notable increase in academic expectations via higher standards, such developments neither ensure educational equity nor guarantee learning for all.

As stated by Darling-Hammond (2010), students of color, English learners, and those who come from high-poverty backgrounds too often do not have access to quality teaching, well-resourced classrooms, and effective literacy programs; in other words, the opportunity to learn is limited. Thus, with the increasing diversity in home languages, content knowledge, prior experiences, and cultural understanding, there is a need for specialized literacy professionals to work collaboratively with students, teachers, school administrators, and community members to ensure achievement for all students.

To meet societal challenges, we need a highly competent teacher workforce that can (a) teach all students to learn to read and write successfully, and (b) integrate literacy in the various disciplines in ways that facilitate students' reading and writing to learn. Scholars have suggested that language and literacy proficiency are central to academic, professional, and personal success, especially related to disciplinary literacy and 21st-century learning (Jacobs & Ippolito, 2015; Moje, 2008; C. Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014; T. Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). With an increased national emphasis on teacher performance evaluation, there is also a call for school-based personnel who can provide the ongoing professional development needed to assist teachers in improving their classroom practices (Goe, 2013; Haertel, Rothstein, Aimrein-Beardsley, & Darling-Hammond, 2011).

Since the early 1950s, the titles and roles of the reading specialist in pre-K–12 school settings have shifted, with titles as diverse as remedial reading teacher, supervisor, literacy coach, and interventionist. For many years, the reading specialist

was the professional who worked with students having difficulty with reading, typically in a small group or one on one. Currently, these professionals fulfill a wider variety of roles and responsibilities than ever before.

Some specialists work in classroom settings with students experiencing difficulty in learning to read and write, often providing Tier 2 and 3 interventions in Response to Intervention programs and processes. Other specialists support the instructional efforts of classroom teachers, lead data team meetings, and/or provide resources, ideas, and professional development for teachers. Still others have a larger role in leading, coordinating, and managing assessment processes. Many have multiple responsibilities, such as instructing students and providing support to teachers (Bean, 2015; Bean, Kern, et al., 2015).

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Three key trends are discernible in the roles of specialized literacy professionals in schools: (1) They are known by many different names or titles; (2) they generally have roles that require them to work with both students and teachers to meet the goals of improving classroom literacy practices and student learning; and (3) they often facilitate or lead school improvement efforts that prioritize effective literacy standards, assessment, and instruction.

Research indicates that reading/literacy specialists have an impact on both students and teachers. There is evidence that literacy specialists/literacy coaches assist in designing and sustaining efforts that result in higher reading achievement (Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolten, & Zigmond, 2010; Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010; Denton, Swanson, & Mathes, 2007; Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011; Lockwood, McCombs, & Marsh, 2010; Matsumura, Garnier, Correnti, Junker, & Bickel, 2010; Matsumura, Garnier, & Spybrook, 2013; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). Specialized literacy professionals have also demonstrated impact on teachers' beliefs and instructional practices (Kinnucan-Welsch, Rosemary, & Grogan, 2006; Steckel, 2009; Stephens et al., 2011; Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). Principals from exemplary schools with specialized literacy professionals on staff indicated that they were vital to the success of the schools' reading programs (Bean, Swan, & Knaub, 2003; Dean, Dyal, Wright, Carpenter, & Austin, 2012). In sum, there appears to be both a need for and a benefit from specialized literacy professionals

working in schools to improve literacy instructional practices and students' literacy learning.

## New Nomenclature for a Critical Specialty

Given this evolution, the International Literacy Association has now conceptualized the roles of the reading/literacy specialist and literacy coach to reflect current thinking and research about the work of these specialized literacy professionals. First, we have switched *reading* to *literacy* when describing these professionals, a change that is consistent with the recent renaming of the International Reading Association (IRA) to the International Literacy Association.

Such a change is also consistent with the current emphasis in today's schools on an integrated literacy curriculum that includes listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing. Administrators expect those who work as specialized literacy professionals to have the skills, knowledge, and dispositions that enable them to develop, implement, and/or evaluate curricular efforts aligned with the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) or other state standards that demand high-level, rigorous thinking.

We now propose to use *specialized literacy professional* as an overarching or umbrella term encompassing three major roles in schools today: the reading/literacy specialist, the literacy coach, and the school coordinator/supervisor. Our rationale is based on research evidence and economic, political, and social conditions that affect schools and how they function. Thus, we move from two separate position statements (IRA, 2000, 2004) to one that describes each of the three roles.

Although role responsibilities overlap, there are specific and meaningful distinctions among the reading/literacy specialist, literacy coach, and school coordinator/supervisor in terms of primary emphasis and in the professional qualifications needed to be effective. Clarification of these roles and qualifications will assist school and district leaders in determining which roles are most needed in specific schools and therefore whom to employ and how to determine which candidates possess the

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appropriate knowledge, dispositions, experiences, and credentials. Clarification will also assist teacher educators in developing programs to prepare these professionals. In the past decade, the accreditation process of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, now known as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, required universities preparing reading specialist candidates to include coaching activities in their certification programs, as well as to continue providing experiences that enabled graduates to teach students who were experiencing difficulties in learning to read and write. However, given program constraints, coaching experiences tended to be introductory and basic, and it was recognized that graduates would exit programs with a novice understanding of coaching, adult learning, and leadership skills. We view the following role distinctions as a way to clarify the differences between and among roles while still emphasizing that an understanding of basic coaching, facilitation, and leadership skills is important for the reading/literacy specialist.

## **Role Distinctions Versus Overlapping Responsibilities**

In a recent national study (Bean, Kern, et al., 2015), distinctions were made in the responsibilities among four response groups: coaches, reading/literacy specialists, reading teachers/interventionists, and supervisors. These distinctions were due to emphasis or focus (e.g., literacy coaches spent more time working with teachers than with students; interventionists spent much of their time working with students). At the same time, nearly 90% of respondents, regardless of title, reported having some responsibilities for working with teachers. That is, they held literacy leadership roles in which they coached teachers, led data team meetings, provided materials and ideas for teachers, developed curriculum, and so on. The nature of those activities across role groups differed, though, with coaches spending more time in coaching activities while reading specialists, for example, spent more time serving as resources to teachers (e.g., problem solving, providing ideas and materials).

Galloway and Lesaux (2014), in their synthesis of research from 2000 to 2014 about the responsibilities and activities of

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reading specialists, provided additional support for the notion of multiple roles of reading specialists. The researchers found that these professionals' roles were influenced by the contexts in which they worked (e.g., student population, teacher needs), as well as by their own professional experiences and education. Galloway and Lesaux also highlighted the many challenges that specialists faced in these roles, with "some more comfortable than others" (p. 519) in roles requiring them to assume new responsibilities. In fact, the role might be conceptualized along a continuum, with some specialists working primarily in a teaching role with students and others spending the majority of their time facilitating teacher learning (e.g., coaching) or leading the literacy program in schools.

Again, given economic conditions in schools, which require personnel to be nimble (i.e., to adjust quickly to varying demands and responsibilities), literacy professionals are expected to handle multiple responsibilities. At times, a single individual in a school, regardless of title, may be expected to teach students experiencing difficulties with reading or writing, support teachers, and assist in the development of the literacy program. In some cases, these specialized literacy professionals juggle numerous job responsibilities all within the course of a single day. In other words, as Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) described, there is a need for "specialists who have specialized training related to addressing reading difficulties and who can give guidance to classroom teachers" (p. 333). The complexity and multiplicity of responsibilities of specialized literacy professionals call for a more clearly defined statement of the expectations and qualifications for each of the three major roles of specialized literacy professionals to help various audiences (i.e., those functioning in such roles, the schools and districts employing them, the universities preparing them) better understand how these professionals function effectively in schools.

## **Primary Roles of Specialized Literacy Professionals**

Specialized literacy professionals hold advanced certification, support student learning, and perform one or more primary roles:

- *Reading/literacy specialists*: Working with students who are experiencing difficulties with reading or writing at all levels (pre-K–12)
- *Literacy coaches*: Improving classroom instruction by supporting teacher learning
- *Literacy coordinators/supervisors*: Developing, leading, and/or evaluating school or district literacy programs

For a more detailed description of responsibilities, see *Standards for Reading Professionals—Revised 2010* (IRA, 2010, pp. 49–50). Each of the specific roles demands somewhat unique responsibilities and tasks, some of which are obtained through formal education, on-the-job mentoring, and/or experience.

## The Reading/Literacy Specialist

The primary role of the reading/literacy specialist is an instructional one, predominantly working with students who are experiencing difficulties with reading and writing. At the same time, to fulfill their instructional role effectively, these specialized literacy professionals must have the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to effectively and collaboratively work with teachers to improve general classroom literacy instruction. They may support teachers by providing resources and ideas about assessment and instruction; some may have basic coaching responsibilities, such as modeling lessons, problem solving with teachers, or facilitating group discussions. Titles for these reading/literacy specialists may vary, such as reading specialist, literacy specialist, interventionist, or reading teacher.

We continue to use the term *reading* because many states, at the present time, offer certification programs for reading specialists. However, we add the term *literacy* to reflect the comprehensive efforts of these professionals because they focus not only on reading but also on writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and representing.

The Response to Intervention initiative has had a great influence on the ways that reading/literacy specialists support readers and writers experiencing difficulty, and the title “interventionist” is often used to describe those reading/literacy specialists working in this role. This type of instructional support in literacy is critical to avoid overreferral and inappropriate placement of children with reading problems into special

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education programs (Allington & Walmsley, 2007; Bursuck & Blanks, 2010; Haager, Klingner & Vaughn, 2007). These personnel are often involved in assessing the literacy learning of students through progress monitoring, assisting in data analysis and interpretation, and participating in decision making about student grouping and movement across tiers.

Bean and colleagues (2003), in their study of reading specialists working in exemplary schools, found that in addition to providing direct instruction to students, these professionals spend a great deal of time serving as resources to classroom teachers. Likewise, the results of a recent national study (Bean, Kern, et al., 2015) point to the teacher-related responsibilities assumed by reading/literacy specialists and reading teachers/interventionists. Thus, although the primary role of the reading/literacy specialist is to provide targeted instruction to students, these individuals must also have a basic understanding of adult learning and leadership skills to effectively support teachers in the schools where they work.

### **The Literacy Coach**

The major role of the literacy coach is to work with teachers and facilitate efforts to improve school literacy programs. These professionals may work with individual or groups of teachers to support them in their efforts to improve classroom instruction. At the same time, they may hold responsibilities that influence literacy programs schoolwide (e.g., developing curriculum, selecting instructional materials). Since the early 2000s, there has been a shift in the role of the reading/literacy specialist from direct teaching of students to more involvement with teacher professional development and leadership. This shift gained momentum from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and its programmatic arm, Reading First, which recommended that reading coaches be employed to support teachers in implementing evidence-based reading instruction. Since that time, given economic downturns and declining resources, there has been some decrease in numbers of coaches employed in schools (Bean, Dole, Nelson, Belcastro, & Zigmond, 2015). However, many districts have funded coaching in more creative ways, shifting the responsibilities of reading/literacy specialists or identifying teacher leaders who can assist their peers in improving literacy instruction (Steinbacher-Reed &

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Powers, 2011). Moreover, other districts have used Title I funds or monies from other state or federal grants to support coaching, either on a full- or part-time basis.

Literacy coaches have many different responsibilities, from serving as a resource to teachers to leading teachers through observation–feedback cycles as a means of providing suggestions for changes in instructional practice. Of the respondents in the national survey (Bean, Kern, et al., 2015) who self-identified as coaches, fewer numbers had certification as reading specialists or literacy coaches in comparison with a previous, similar study (Bean, Cassidy, Grumet, Shelton, & Wallis, 2002). We emphasize, therefore, the need for those who serve in such coaching roles to have the knowledge, understandings, skills, and dispositions expected of reading/literacy specialists (IRA, 2006). Without these competencies, literacy coaches might find it difficult to provide the effective job-embedded professional development that improves literacy instruction (L’Allier, Elish-Piper, & Bean, 2010).

According to Ippolito and Lieberman (2012), differences exist between coaching at the elementary and secondary levels that affect the ways in which coaches work and also the qualifications they need to be successful. The purpose of schooling is different, with secondary-level teachers focusing on teaching the content of their specific disciplines, while elementary teachers tend to focus on the development of literacy skills necessary for engaging in reading and writing across the disciplines. Teachers at the secondary level may not have an in-depth understanding of literacy instruction and how it can have a positive impact on disciplinary learning. Even the culture and schedules at the secondary level can affect the work of literacy coaches (e.g., less flexibility, teachers working with many students for shorter periods of time). Thus, literacy coaches at the secondary level, especially those who do not have experience at the middle and high school levels, will need to establish credibility with their colleagues (Mason & Ippolito, 2009).

However, although there are differences, the coaching processes are similar, and Ippolito and Lieberman (2012) suggested that differences “may be more a matter of degree than of fundamental difference” (p. 69). Given the culture of secondary schools and the focus on working with teachers in the disciplines, school leaders have generated various ideas for

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implementing coaching initiatives (Bean & Eisenberg, 2009; Mason & Ippolito, 2009).

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### **The Literacy Coordinator/Supervisor**

The literacy coordinator/supervisor's major responsibilities are to lead, coordinate, and/or evaluate the literacy program in schools. Findings from recent studies (Bean, Kern, et al., 2015; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014) indicated that specialized literacy professionals often have responsibilities that extend beyond working with students and teachers:

- Lead committee efforts to develop and implement the school literacy program and select or develop materials
- Collaborate with parents or community agencies to increase the effectiveness of school literacy efforts
- Write and manage proposals for Title I or other grants
- Work with school leaders, such as principals and other coordinators, to assist in school change efforts

These professionals may also be asked to work closely with administrators to implement a system of teacher performance evaluation, requiring them to make judgments about teacher performance, provide the professional learning experiences that improve teaching practices, or both. If literacy coordinators/supervisors are asked to make judgments about teaching performance, then their role is necessarily changed from that of collegial coaching to one that requires them to participate in a more supervisory role. It is primarily for this reason that we identify the need for this third role of literacy coordinator/supervisor. Those specialized literacy professionals who are being asked to engage in evaluation activities should be given titles that distinguish them from literacy coaches who are expected to function in a purely supportive, collegial role.

We suggest that aspects of these roles are overlapping yet increasing in intensity and scope of responsibilities and expectations. For example, in their leadership roles, all specialized literacy professionals may have coaching responsibilities, although the type and frequency of such activities differ. In this document, we include a chart of the varying levels of intensity as a means of illustrating the coaching activities that may be the responsibility of specialized literacy professionals (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1. Coaching Activities (Levels of Intensity) of Specialized Literacy Professionals**

<b>Level 1 (Informal; Building Relationships)</b>	<b>Level 2 (More Formal; Somewhat More Intense; Begin to Analyze Practice)</b>	<b>Level 3 (Formal; More Intense; Focus on Changing Practice)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversations with colleagues (getting to know one another, identifying issues or needs, setting goals, initial problem solving)</li> <li>• Establishing schedules for meeting with groups of teachers and individuals</li> <li>• Establishing norms for collaboration and conversation</li> <li>• Developing and providing materials for/ with colleagues</li> <li>• Developing curriculum with colleagues</li> <li>• Participating in professional development activities with colleagues (conferences, workshops)</li> <li>• Leading or participating in study groups</li> <li>• Assisting with assessment of students</li> <li>• Instructing students to learn about their strengths and needs</li> <li>• Coaching on the fly (unscheduled, brief meetings with teachers that provide opportunities for additional coaching)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversations with individual colleagues about teaching, learning, and literacy (analyzing data, lessons)</li> <li>• Coplanning lessons</li> <li>• Revisiting norms for collaboration and conversation to make certain they facilitate group work</li> <li>• Holding team meetings (grade level, data, department)</li> <li>• Analyzing student work to assist teacher(s) in planning instruction</li> <li>• Analyzing and interpreting assessment data (helping teachers use results for instructional decision making)</li> <li>• Making presentations at professional development meetings</li> <li>• Assisting with online professional development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversations focusing on coplanning, coteaching, and teaching dilemmas</li> <li>• Modeling and discussing lessons</li> <li>• Coteaching lessons</li> <li>• Visiting classrooms and providing feedback to teachers as part of the planning/observation/debrief cycle</li> <li>• Individual and group analysis of videotaped lessons of teachers</li> <li>• Engaging in lesson study with teachers</li> <li>• Participating in and leading professional learning communities</li> <li>• Providing support to teachers as a result of teacher performance evaluation outcomes</li> <li>• Involvement in efforts to improve school literacy programs</li> <li>• Facilitating school–community partnership work</li> </ul>

Note. We used two sources in the creation of this table: "Promoting Effective Literacy Instruction: The Challenge for Literacy Coaches," by R.M. Bean, 2004, *The California Reader*, 37(3), 58–63; and "Professional Learning as the Key to Linking Content and Literacy Instruction," by J. Ippolito, 2013, in J. Ippolito, J.F. Lawrence, and C. Zaller (Eds.), *Adolescent Literacy in the Era of the Common Core: From Research Into Practice* (pp. 215–234), Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

## Importance of Leadership and Coaching for All Roles

There is strong evidence that a key factor in school improvement is shared or distributed leadership, in which teachers are engaged in decision making, and schools become places of learning for both teachers and students (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). In a study investigating the influence of leadership on student learning, Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) found that collective leadership, in which many partners have a voice in making school decisions, is closely linked to student achievement.

In a study of the role of personnel in schools implementing Response to Intervention, Bean and Lillenstein (2012) found that collaboration was the norm: Each school had a leadership team composed of reading specialists or coaches, specialized educators, the principal, and often the psychologist or other specialized professionals. These individuals worked collaboratively with teachers to discuss schoolwide data and make

recommendations about the use of data to inform instruction. Two key findings were (1) the important roles of specialized literacy professionals (i.e., coaches, reading specialists) in supporting teachers and leading the development and implementation of the literacy program, and (2) the frequency with which these specialized literacy professionals worked as a team to lead school improvement efforts.

Specialized literacy professionals are finding themselves in leadership roles, not only in serving as a resource to teachers but also in leading professional learning activities and facilitating the development of professional learning communities as a means of developing schoolwide literacy improvement (Bean & Swan Dagen, 2012; Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2015). As school leaders, they have important responsibilities for assisting teachers as they implement curriculum or programs in response to district, state, or federal policy about literacy assessment or instruction (Coburn & Woulfin, 2012). Given the many different ways that specialized literacy professionals work with teachers, they need to be knowledgeable about leadership, school change, and adult learning. Table 2 identifies guidelines for literacy leadership in schools (Costello, Lipson, Marinak, & Zolman, 2010).

**TABLE 2. Guidelines for Literacy Leadership**

- *Have a literacy vision.* A vision is a bridge from the present to the future. Create and communicate a powerful but simple literacy vision. Build trust by involving all stakeholders. Avoid decision paralysis. After sharing the vision, make sure it is communicated accurately.
- *Be a model for effective collaboration and communication.* Personalize communication about literacy efforts by communicating face to face as often as possible. During challenging discussions, pose questions that encourage sharing of information. Actively listen before offering suggestions or making a decision.
- *Build trust.* Literacy leaders need to be perceived as working consciously and consistently on behalf of all readers. Take actions that are concrete and directly observable by the (other) staff. For example, teach core or intervention lessons to learn about the needs of your readers. Offer to demonstrate a technique or method you suggest. Be consistent in your support and make sure that you follow up.
- *Be credible.* Promote situational interest and commitment to students by honoring all student data. Carefully analyze how and why instruction and/or interventions are working or not working. Articulate the attributes of instruction that cause students to gain in proficiency. Effectiveness can be replicated only if it is understood and defined.
- *Encourage emotions.* Feelings inspire people to act. Approaching literacy from strictly an analytical perspective can hinder the ability to feel. Be sure to link the efforts of teachers and others to the gains made by students. Attribute students' growth to the specific actions of the teachers working on their behalf.

Note. Adapted from "New Roles for Educational Leaders: Starting and Sustaining a Systemic Approach to RTI," by K.A. Costello, M.Y. Lipson, B. Marinak, and M.F. Zolman, 2010, in M.Y. Lipson and K.K. Wixson (Eds.), *Successful Approaches to RTI: Collaborative Practices for Improving K–12 Literacy* (pp. 231–260), Newark, DE: International Reading Association. Copyright 2010 by the International Reading Association.



## Qualifications of Specialized Literacy Professionals

One of the challenges faced by those in institutions offering reading/literacy specialist certification is how to develop programs that prepare candidates with a strong foundation of literacy research and instruction while simultaneously teaching them how to assume responsibility for teaching students who experience difficulty with reading and writing, coaching teachers, and facilitating the development of a rigorous and differentiated literacy program schoolwide. In the past, many institutions did not include the coursework or experiences necessary for these candidates to effectively assume coaching or leadership tasks in schools (Quatroche & Wepner, 2008; Wepner & Quatroche, 2011). However, given the requirements of the 2010 IRA Standards, many more institutions have shifted to include preparation experiences that take into account the leadership and coaching roles that specialists and coaches often assume in schools.

Another challenge is that some teachers begin reading/literacy specialist programs with limited classroom teaching experience. Prior to taking a specialized position that puts them in a coaching or leadership role, candidates likely need on-the-job experiences working with students experiencing difficulty with reading and writing, and serving informally as resources to teachers. Such experiences in schools with students may be a prerequisite to becoming a specialist, necessary to develop the competencies needed for later, more challenging positions and to earn credibility with future colleagues. With increasing expectations for specialists to assume leadership roles, they also need on-the-job mentoring from a more experienced colleague to transition from teaching students to leading and mentoring teachers. In Table 3, we show some major distinctions for the three primary roles, highlighting differences in experiences, knowledge of literacy, and understanding of leadership/organizational change.

To assist teacher educators in preparation programs intended for specialized literacy professionals, we make the following recommendations:

- All specialized literacy programs should include an extensive core foundation in literacy knowledge and research beyond that of initial teacher preparation. In addition to extending

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**TABLE 3. Matrix for Roles of Specialized Literacy Professionals**

Domain	Reading/Literacy Specialist	Literacy Coach	Literacy Coordinator/Supervisor
Professional experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent classroom teachers (two years of teaching experience by completion of reading/literacy certification program)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading/literacy specialist certification</li> <li>• Minimum of four years of teaching experience—if possible, at the levels of the teachers they coach</li> <li>• Experiences working with teaching peers (e.g., leading professional development sessions, leading data meetings, book clubs, teacher study groups)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading/literacy specialist certification</li> <li>• Minimum of three years as a literacy specialist or coach—if possible, at all levels they supervise</li> <li>• Experience in writing grant proposals, curriculum development, teacher support, observation, and mentoring</li> <li>• Strong understandings of research applications</li> </ul>
Knowledge and skills of literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth knowledge of reading/literacy processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction (pre-K–12)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth knowledge of reading/literacy processes, acquisition, assessment, evaluation, and instruction (pre-K–12)</li> <li>• Understanding of pre-K–12 literacy curriculum and standards</li> <li>• Ability to use current knowledge to transform instruction and assessment at the classroom level and to influence change at the school level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive knowledge of literacy programs, materials, standards, curriculum, and data-based decision making</li> <li>• Ability to use current research and policy to transform instruction and assessment at the school level</li> </ul>
Knowledge of change processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of organizational change and distributed or shared leadership</li> <li>• Knowledge of adult learning theory</li> <li>• Application of adult learning theory, including basic coaching practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge and understanding of factors that affect teacher change</li> <li>• Application of adult learning theory to practice in working with teachers, including understanding of various coaching models and techniques</li> <li>• Understanding of how to lead a change process in schools (writing curriculum, leading improvement efforts)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of effective leadership goals and principles to promote change</li> <li>• Extensive understanding of how to facilitate professional development, engage learners in collaborative processes, and support teacher efforts</li> <li>• Understanding of organizational change and leadership</li> </ul>

Note. For more detailed explanations, see *Standards for Reading Professionals—Revised 2010*, by the International Reading Association, 2010, Newark, DE: Author.

candidates’ knowledge of foundational areas of reading (e.g., vocabulary, comprehension, phonics, emergent literacy, fluency), the coursework should be inclusive of contextual factors influencing student learning (e.g., second-language learning, child development) and of the wide range of literacy knowledge (e.g., writing instruction, oral language). This instruction should be grounded in research on best practices, including how to understand and apply research findings.

- All specialized literacy professional programs should include a supervised practicum experience in which candidates engage with students experiencing difficulties with reading and writing, their families, and their teachers to extend candidates’ experiences with appropriate planning, assessment, and instruction. Further, the practicum experience should include various experiences related to adult learning and leadership. Embedded throughout the program, such experiences will assist those

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with limited teaching and school experience in working with colleagues in both a formal and informal manner (e.g., facilitating professional learning communities, serving as a resource).

- Furthermore, those who will function as literacy coaches or literacy coordinators/supervisors should take more advanced coursework and engage in practicum experiences that include the following: information on leading professional development/learning with adults, collaboration with other stakeholders (e.g., administrators, colleagues, families, community members), and theory and research about instruction in the English language arts and the disciplines.
- All programs with online coursework and experiences should maintain the same expectations for literacy practicum and fieldwork as they might in a school-based or campus setting. For example, online experiences should include interactions with families, teaching a diverse range of students (both academically and culturally), and engaging with teaching colleagues on data-informed instructional decision making. Any practicum offered in an online environment should include online simulations, extensive video capture of teaching interactions, and reflections on the content between the graduate student and the instructor/supervisor.
- Although classroom teachers may enter a reading/literacy specialist program with limited teaching experience, they should have at least two years of teaching experience prior to assuming a reading/literacy specialist position. The graduate-level certification program should prepare professionals to more effectively teach literacy and select targeted literacy interventions, especially for those students with diverse learning needs and abilities.

## **Recommendations**

We conclude by offering specific recommendations to four vital stakeholder groups concerned with the preparation, employment, achievement, and professional development of specialized literacy professionals.

### **States and Federal Policymakers**

- Provide support for preparation and professional development for all specialized literacy professionals, with high expectations

for the education, knowledge, and skills of all role groups, and for educators providing the professional development.

- Design state-level requirements for certification and endorsement programs that reflect the broad field of current research, as well as extensive research in specific areas of literacy learning.
- Require practicum experiences in certification programs by which candidates can demonstrate their deep understanding of literacy and how to apply that understanding to work with students, teachers, and families.

### **School District Administrators and School Boards**

- Employ specialized literacy professionals who have the qualifications to perform the tasks/activities of the specific role. Each position should have a clear and differentiated job title and written expectations for job roles and responsibilities.
- Provide ongoing, job-embedded support and professional learning experiences for all specialized literacy professionals in the district. Consider assigning mentors to novice professionals or encourage participation in various professional learning activities, including the formation and support of in-district and cross-district networks of reading/literacy specialists/coaches/coordinators.
- Conceptualize each position relative to expectations for time spent with students and/or teachers. Reconceptualize each position, as needed, based on new policies and budget shifts, to preserve instructional and coaching roles for literacy professionals.
- Provide principals, administrators, and/or supervisors who support and evaluate literacy professionals with extensive preparation and understanding of literacy goals, practices, and expectations. An evaluator of specialized literacy professionals should have extensive experience and knowledge of literacy practices.
- Engage in collaborative conversations in which knowledgeable specialized literacy professionals are key stakeholders in the decision-making process relative to curriculum, materials, instruction, and assessment of literacy practices in the district.

### **Specialized Literacy Professionals**

- Stay current on literacy research, practices, and policies to lead schools and districts in making strong and reliable decisions that positively impact all students and teachers.



- Facilitate positive interactions among school and district administrators, principals, classroom teachers, reading specialists, students, and parents. Create a shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of literacy professionals.
- Fulfill a professional role with respect for others, meaningful interactions with colleagues, and reflection on feedback from other educators and from experiences.
- Maintain high expectations for any newly adopted intervention, including extensive research and investigation of the approach and needs of students in the district or school.
- Engage in continuous learning on how to lead and engage adults (e.g., teaching colleagues) in professional development, data-based decision making, study groups, and so forth. Understand how to lead and/or participate in a change process within schools to improve literacy practices and improve outcomes for all learners.

## **Teacher Educators and Professional Development Providers**

- Build collaborative partnerships with faculty in a variety of disciplines to facilitate an integrated and comprehensive view of literacy as a foundation for all learning.
- Build collaborative partnerships with school districts and specialized literacy professionals to facilitate strong and effective supervised practicum experiences for teacher candidates.
- Provide opportunities for specialized literacy professionals to work with and advocate for diverse learners in a variety of school settings.
- Engage in continuous learning on ways to lead and engage specialized literacy professionals in research-based curriculum and instruction, professional development, data-informed decision making, communication technologies, study groups, and so forth. Understand and provide experiences on how specialized literacy professionals become leaders and/or participate in a change process within schools to improve literacy practice.
- Stay current on literacy research, practices, and policies to provide candidates and teachers with up-to-date information.
- Provide principals, administrators, and/or supervisors who evaluate literacy professionals with extensive preparation and understanding of literacy goals, practices, and expectations.

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