INTERNATIONAL LITERACY ASSOCIATION

ILA E-SSENTIALS

LITERACY PRACTICES THAT ADOLESCENTS DESERVE

Implementing a Schoolwide Literacy Action Plan for Adolescents

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The eight elements of the revised Adolescent Literacy position statement (International Reading Association, 2012) clearly reflect the need for school and district leaders to marshal the combined efforts of teachers, parents, and the community in preparing adolescents to become productive, literate citizens.

In addition to these eight elements is the increased instructional rigor associated with the Common Core State Standards. To make sure that adolescents actually get what they deserve, school and district literacy leaders must engage in developing, implementing, monitoring, and sustaining a literacy action plan. In this article, we outline a process that literacy leaders have found helpful to reach this goal. This process grew out of the Taking Action Literacy Leadership Model (see Figure 1). The five action points of the model (implement a literacy action plan, support teachers to improve instruction, use data to make decisions, build leadership capacity, and allocate resources) represent what school and district literacy leaders need to know and be able to do to support student

motivation, engagement, and achievement in literacy. These five actions are recursive and simultaneous; that is, they occur every day in one form or another and interact with each other in powerful ways.

Figure 1. Taking Action Literacy Leadership Model

Cover image:AbleStock.com/Thinkstock.com
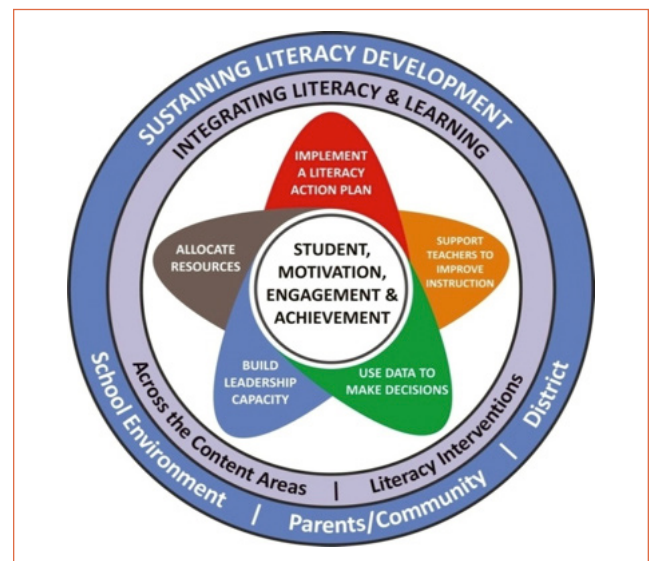
For a full description, see *Taking Action on Adolescent Literacy: An Implementation Guide for School Leaders* (Irvin, Meltzer, & Dukes, 2007).

The Taking Action Literacy Leadership Process has five stages that guide school- or district-based leaders to implement a literacy action plan (see Figure 2). For a full explanation of each stage, see *Taking the Lead on Adolescent Literacy: Action Steps for Schoolwide Success* (Irvin, Meltzer, Dean, & Mickler, 2010).

You have probably read school improvement plans that are well written and speak to the many needs of a school. Many school improvement plans, however, fail to target content-based literacy improvement as central to the school's mission. The process outlined here provides for a customized action plan that represents the cyclical nature of assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring, review, and revision.

In **Stage 1, Get Ready:** Establish the literacy leadership team and acknowledge the need for a schoolwide literacy improvement effort. The team then develops a data-driven vision for a culture of literacy that inspires the entire school to join forces in a systemic literacy improvement initiative over time.

In **Stage 2, Assess:** The team identifies the strengths of the school, examines a variety of school data, uses the literacy action rubrics to assess the school's capacity to support systemic literacy development, and converts the self-assessment data into effective and realistic literacy action goals.

In **Stage 3, Plan:** The team creates implementation maps with strategic action steps

for each literacy action goal, using the literacy action rubrics as a guide. To ensure buy-in from school colleagues, the team solicits feedback on the plan's goals and action steps from the entire school community.

In **Stage 4, Implement:** The team begins implementing the action steps of literacy action plan. Throughout the school year, the team monitors the implementation of the various action steps and assesses progress made toward the established broad goals.

In **Stage 5, Sustain:** The team reviews summative data as prescribed by the literacy action plan to determine if the goals have been met. On the basis of the data, the team decides whether to keep a specific goal and revise the action steps as needed, discard the goal, or select a new goal.

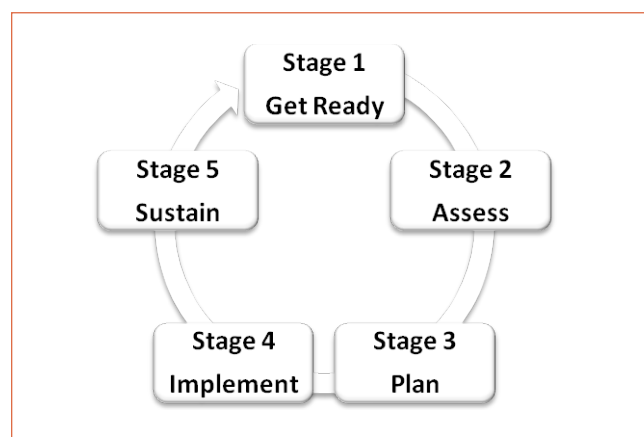## Get Your Literacy Improvement Effort Underway

Stage 1: Get Ready

Step 1: Build an Effective Literacy Team
We have found that an effective literacy leadership team is one of the most viable and efficient means for moving a school toward rigorous literacy-embedded instruction. The team plays an essential role in developing, implementing, and sustaining a literacy action plan. When members of the team represent the entire school community, the team can serve as a resource for the entire faculty and guide the direction of the school's literacy improvement effort. Establishing a literacy team who is representative of the entire school community communicates to teachers that their voices are important and that they play a critical role in moving all students toward increased literacy and academic achievement. A literacy leadership team should have 8 to 10 members and should be representative of the school's community. We suggest the following members:

- Content area teachers: representatives from English language arts, social studies, mathematics, science, and art departments
- A school administrator (principal or assistant principal for curriculum)
- A reading specialist/literacy coach, if available
- A media specialist

Figure 2. Five Stages of Taking Action Literacy Leadership Process

- A teacher of English learners
- A special education teacher
- A parent, if available
- A student

We suggest that you consider the following criteria for the selection of teachers for the team. Teachers who

- Are strong proponents of literacy
- Are considered by their peers to be school leaders
- Are comfortable inviting colleagues into their classrooms during instruction
- Have demonstrated interest in participating in study groups or other professional development activities

Step 2: Develop a Common Vision of a Literacy-Rich School

A common vision is important because many people do not have a clear vision of what a literacy-rich school looks, sounds, and feels like. Teachers within a school may not even share a common definition of literacy. Before you can expect to agree on your school's literacy goals, it is important to come to a common understanding about literacy. Ask teachers to engage in a discussion using the following prompt: *If your school were a model example of a literacy-rich school, what would the school environment look like? What would teachers be doing? Students? School leaders?* If you are working with a large group, assign one of the following points to a small group to brainstorm and then conclude the activity with a carousel walk of all of the posters. Figure 3 shows an example of one team's overall perception of the degree to which literacy is embedded in the culture of the school.

Step 3: Use Data to Validate and Communicate the Need for Literacy Improvement

Some stakeholders do not see the need to embark on a literacy improvement effort. However, teachers can usually be motivated to buy in to a literacy improvement effort when confronted with the data on how students in their school are performing against the demands of college, citizenship, and the world of work. Collecting baseline data will also help the team track progress toward your goal to have students improve as readers and writers.

Now that your literacy leadership team is up and running, you have examined your school data, and you have created some common language and vision about literacy, it is time for the team to assess the current implementation of literacy in your school and identify some clear, measureable, and feasible goals for your literacy action plan. It is helpful if the team can schedule a retreat or longer periods of time to meet in which to complete the activities in Stages 2 and 3. However, if this is not possible, Stages 2 and 3 can be broken into steps that can be accomplished over time. The steps in

Figure 3. Sample School Literacy-Rich Brainstorm Poster

Stage 2 are intended to be completed sequentially because they build directly upon one another.

Stage 2: Assess

Step 1: Identify Your School's Strengths

Every school has strengths. In your school, there might be strengths such as caring faculty members, robust music or sports programs, students who are resilient and energetic, adequate resources, a supportive district, or a parent community that is actively supportive of the school. Because an effective literacy improvement effort builds on the current capacity of a school, it is important to begin planning for literacy improvement by first identifying and celebrating the school's strengths. Hearing what team members perceive to be strengths is enlightening and reinforces the importance of multiple perspectives.

Step 2: Analyze and Summarize Your School's Data

The team now analyzes the student data and creates a wall chart to write summary frames: *Although* _____(something good), *we still need to work on* _____. For example, a school may have good overall writing scores, but the team finds that the girls outperform the boys on writing. One of the summary sentences might be *Although our writing scores are above the state/provincial and district average, we still need to work on increasing the average score of our boys to meet the average score of our girls.* By limiting the response to a single sentence, team members must focus on what they determine to be the essential findings of the data. Encourage team members to focus on the most important findings of the data as they construct their sentence frames.

Once all team members are finished writing their sentences, the meeting facilitator combines responses into a two-column data summary chart, one column labeled Although (Strengths) and the other column labeled Needs. Post the chart in a prominent place for further reference by the team during the goal-setting and action-planning processes (see Figure 4 for a sample school chart).

Step 3: Assess Current School Implementation Using a Literacy Action Rubric

In Step 3, literacy leadership team members will use a literacy action rubric to assess current

Figure 4. Sample School Data Summary Chart

school literacy practice. We provide you with a [rubric](#) designed from the eight components of the Adolescent Literacy position statement. At the conclusion of this step, the literacy leadership team will have reached consensus about its assessment of the strengths and challenges of the school in terms of literacy support and development.

During Step 3, team members will first have an opportunity to think about their individual perception of how the school currently addresses each component of the rubric. The opportunity to think and reflect before the group discussion will prepare each team member to contribute actively to the consensus-building process. After team members complete their individual assessment, the team will use the consensus decision-making process to develop a collective assessment of the school's current capacity to support literacy and learning. The act of reaching consensus takes into account multiple perspectives about the school's current status and enables the members of the literacy leadership team to get on the same page about the school's current practice in each area.

Individual Rankings: First, individual team members rank their perception of the school's implementation on each indicator of each component of the adolescent literacy rubric. Team members do this independently, without discussion, by placing a check where they think *typical school practice* falls on the rubric. The individually ranked rubrics will form the basis for the discussion, consensus building, and goal setting that follow.

As individual members rank the components of the rubric, they should jot down the evidence they used to make their decisions. This could include student test scores, knowledge of particular programs, specific team or department practices, or classroom observation. Thinking carefully about evidence deepens the conversation about the school's ratings on the rubrics. As team members consider and write down the evidence for their decisions, they go beyond a first reaction to a more studied and thoughtful ranking, providing a foundation for the consensus discussion and group recording of evidence that follows.

A team member might ask, "But how do we know what others in the school are doing?" Team members should rank the school on the basis of what they know of the school and jot down that perspective on the top of the rubric (e.g., from the perspective of the science department or from the perspective of my own teaching). When all of the perspectives are pulled together in the next step of the activity, these more local perspectives will add depth and accuracy. Someone might ask also, "What happens if some people do this but not everyone?" That is fine. The meeting facilitator encourages team members to read the description of each level as carefully as possible and make a match as accurately as possible. The goal is not to mark down or give extra credit but to accurately reflect *on the basis of the perspective of each individual* where the school should be ranked on each component. This opportunity to think and reflect before the group discussion helps ensure that the group as a whole will benefit from everyone's perspectives.

Consensus Building: Once everyone has completed the independent ranking on the basis of his or her perspective of each component, the team comes to consensus about the school's current literacy implementation. The meeting facilitator will record and then lead a discussion based on team members' independent rankings. One way to do this is to list each of the components of the rubric on a large wall chart (sticky chart paper works well) and use the chart to record team members'

rankings. The checks indicate each team member's assessment.

When everyone's individual rating on each component has been recorded, the team discusses where the team's ratings are in sync and where they are widely divergent. The role of the meeting facilitator is to lead the discussion and decision making on a group consensus ranking. After each component is discussed, the meeting facilitator indicates consensus by placing a star at the level the team feels is truly reflective of the school's current level of practice.

Note that this is *not* an average of the individual ratings. The exact placement of the star is less important than describing trends, recognizing strengths, and understanding the needs of the school. This is not a time to argue for a particular assessment rating on a specific component, but rather to develop a collective understanding of what the team members believe to be the current level of practice in the school relative to systemic support of literacy development. At the end of the discussion, the team should have a completed chart such as the one shown in Figure 5, which shows the team's consensus rating for each component of the rubric.

Step 4: Draft Literacy Action Goals

At this point, the literacy leadership team has the information it needs to develop effective,

Figure 5. Sample Team Consensus Chart

measurable, feasible literacy action goals. These goals serve to drive the literacy action planning that the team will undergo in the next stage, Stage 3, of the Taking Action Literacy Leadership Process. The team should articulate the school's most urgent adolescent literacy needs and develop measurable literacy action goals based on those needs.

First, team members examine the group consensus chart, the school strengths concept map, and the data summary chart and individually identify 3 to 5 components that they think should be the focus of the literacy action plan. Team members also look at rubric components that they feel are important for the school to address but which were ranked low in terms of implementation (ranking of Level 1 or 2 on some or all indicators). Or team members may choose a component ranked at a Level 3 that represents an area of strength for the school, but one they want to see pushed to Level 4 implementation. Team members should also think about the following:

- What do student data indicate about students' needs?
- Which of these priority components is feasible to address in the next year?
- Which of the strengths of the school listed on the map can be used to address challenge areas?

Constructing clear, concrete goal statements to guide your literacy action plan is not an easy task. To ensure success, team members should revisit the needs that they collectively identified as most important and as feasible to address. Then, articulate these as measurable goal statements. Criteria for good goals are as follows:

- Can be met with collaborative effort and resources
- Would make a positive difference for students
- Are limited in number (2–4) and will direct your literacy improvement efforts over the next year
- Are measurable and have trackable progress
- Have goal statements written with clear, specific language that is jargon free and can be understood by everyone in the school community

As you develop your literacy action goals, keep in mind that goals can be written in a variety of formats. You may wish to write a goal in which you

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state what the students will do, such as *Students will routinely use literacy support strategies in each of their content area classes.* Or you may wish to write a goal in which you state a number or percentage to improve or change, such as *The number of students scoring in the bottom quartile in reading on our state assessment will decrease by 10%.*

The focus of Stage 3 is on developing a relevant and realistic literacy action plan that incorporates feedback from stakeholders and leads to action. For each adolescent literacy action goal created by the team in Stage 2, the team develops an implementation map. Each implementation map comprises a set of action steps designed to support progress toward one of the team's goal statements. Collectively, these implementation maps will compose the school's formal literacy action plan, along with information about members of the team as well as the planning and design process that the team used to build the plan.

In Stage 3, the team also solicits feedback from the school community about the action steps in each implementation map to create buy-in and to ensure that the work of the literacy leadership team is clear and inclusive from the outset. The team then discusses the feedback, revises the implementation maps accordingly, and publishes the formal literacy action plan. The steps of Stage 3 are designed to be completed sequentially as they build directly upon one another.

Stage 3: Plan

Step 1: Develop an Implementation Map for Each Literacy Action Goal

In Step 1, the team develops an implementation map using an implementation map template (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Implementation Map Template

Literacy Action Goal Statement: _____

A Action Step	B Timeline (target date)	C Lead Person(s)	D Resources Needed	E Specifics of Implementation	F Measures of Success
Action Step 1					
Action Step 2					
Action Step 3					

Note. This template is taken from Irvin, J., Meltzer, J., Dean, N., & Mickler, M.J. (2010). *Taking the Lead on Adolescent Literacy: Action Steps for Schoolwide Success.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Step 2: Solicit Feedback From the School Community

In Step 2, the literacy leadership team shares the implementation maps with the wider school community and solicits feedback. This step is designed to inform the faculty of the literacy leadership team's efforts and to gather input, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard. See Figure 7 for a sample feedback form.

Step 3: Revise Literacy Action Goal Statements and Implementation Maps

In Step 3, the tasks of the literacy leadership team are as follows:

• Review the feedback
• Make any necessary revisions to the implementation maps
• Add information needed to preface the plan (e.g., rationale for a focus on literacy, connection between the plan and school and district improvement goals, process engaged in by the team to develop the plan, names of team members)

• Present the complete literacy action plan to faculty, parents, students, the school board, and the larger community

Reviewing the feedback from faculty and incorporating their suggestions are essential ingredients for ensuring the plan's success. Although this step can be time-consuming, it is well worth the effort, as it builds the foundation for buy-in from the larger school community. Then the team is ready to share the literacy action plan with all stakeholders: faculty, staff, parents, students, and the community.

In Stage 4, you are ready to implement the plan. After all, no matter how well your literacy action plan has been designed, nothing will happen if the action steps are not implemented with fidelity.

Stage 4: Implement

Step 1: Organize for Success

Depending on the action steps identified, you will need to organize and plan. You may need to plan for professional development sessions, a literacy kickoff

Figure 7. Sample Feedback Form

1. Goal Statements
In your groups, read and discuss the goals your literacy leadership team selected for the school year. Place a check on the line below each goal to indicate the degree to which your group agrees or disagrees with the goal. Then write down any suggestions you have for modifying the goals.

Goal Statement #1: All students will learn and routinely use reading and writing support strategies to enhance literacy and learning in across all content areas.
Agree——✓————————Disagree

How we would modify this goal:
(For example) ...*Be more specific about strategies.*

2. Implementation Map
In your groups, read and discuss the implementation map for each goal, reaching consensus about whether you agree or disagree with the plan. At the bottom of each map, use the following scale to indicate the views of your group:

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree

Then write down the suggestions and comments of your group members, indicating specifics that will improve the implementation map.
(For example) ...*We need to know more specifics about instructional strategies. Which ones? How many? Are they new strategies?*

3. Needed Support
What support (professional development, demonstration lessons, coaching) do you need to participate in to implement this goal and this map?

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for all faculty, or demonstration days. The timeline provided in the implementation map should be used as a guideline for organizing for action.

Step 2: Monitor and Troubleshoot Implementation

In Step 2, the team asks the question, "To what extent are we following the implementation maps as designed?" A specific map might not get implemented as intended for many reasons, including time demands, conflicting initiatives, or change of administration. A major responsibility of the literacy leadership team is to make sure that quality implementation is occurring as planned. To complete an evidence-based review of implementation, the team can use protocol listed in the implementation monitoring template (see Figure 8) to help monitor progress toward goals.

Step 3: Use Data to Track Progress Toward Your Literacy Goals

To monitor and troubleshoot implementation, you will collect, review, and analyze the kinds of data you outlined in each implementation map as measures of success. Use these data to determine if implementation is going as planned. The literacy leadership team will want to examine evidence that shows the initiative is making a difference for classroom teaching and learning. Certainly you will use student performance data on the state/provincial assessment or on district-mandated tests as one outcome to examine. But other sources of data can be used strategically to determine if progress is being made. Four valuable types of data to collect and analyze are

1. Samples of teacher assignments and student work
2. Teacher survey data
3. Student feedback data
4. Literacy classroom walk-through data

Through examination and analysis of these data, the team will be able to assess progress toward goals and report findings to other stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, school board

Figure 8. Implementation Monitoring Template

Literacy Action Goal Statement:			
Date of meeting:			
Attendees:			
Column 1 Action Step	Column 2 Where are we now?	Column 3 Are we on track? Yes/No/Somewhat	Column 4 Actions the team needs to take (based on the Action Points of the Model)

Note. This template is taken from Irvin, J., Meltzer, J., Dean, N., & Mickler, M. J. (2010). *Taking the Lead on Adolescent Literacy: Action Steps for Schoolwide Success.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

members, district leaders, members of the business community). Remember, the team does not bear the total responsibility for collecting all appropriate progress-monitoring data. Administrators, data coordinators, and district office personnel should assist the team. Although data are the team's best ally, too much data can be overwhelming. A single-minded focus on data collection and analysis can overshadow implementation and other important roles of the literacy team, bringing momentum on literacy improvement to a halt.

Step 4: Sustain Momentum and Celebrate Accomplishments

We recommend that the adolescent literacy leadership team finds ways to recognize and celebrate accomplishments of team members, faculty members who have implemented effective literacy practices, and students who have contributed to the literacy improvement effort. The following are some ways that a school literacy leader can recognize faculty and staff.

- Set aside time in faculty meetings for faculty members to describe their efforts and share successful literacy practices
- Provide opportunities to describe and celebrate teacher and staff accomplishments to others in the district

- Provide remuneration for time spent on the literacy initiative outside of teachers' contract hours
- Distribute coupons and gifts from local businesses for exemplary literacy initiative implementation
- Offer periodic coverage for classes to provide time to share ideas and experiences in departments or teams
- Provide resources for the creation and display of posters throughout the school
- Submit articles to local newspapers about the work in adolescent literacy
- Feature the initiative on the school's website and in social media

Another way of recognizing and celebrating accomplishments is to make meetings celebratory and festive. Providing food goes a long way toward making people feel appreciated. If budgets are tight, think about asking the Parent Teacher Organization or a local business to sponsor refreshments at student and faculty events and professional development sessions.

Because Stage 5 involves review and revision, approaches and tools used in earlier stages of the adolescent literacy leadership process are revisited. As you work through the steps of Stage 5, it is important to remember the value of making each team member feel appreciated and included in decision making.

Stage 5: Sustain

Step 1: Summarize Progress Toward Goals
The team revisits the adolescent literacy action goals and implementation maps to form a summative assessment of progress. This assessment begins with a return to the adolescent literacy action rubric. Individual team members should rank their perception of the school's implementation on each indicator of each component of the literacy action rubric. As before, team members reflect independently, without discussion, by placing a check where they think typical school practice falls on the rubric. The individually ranked rubrics will form the basis for the discussion, consensus building, and reflection that follow.

Step 2: Revise Implementation Maps
If you met last year's literacy improvement goals, or feel that goals need to be discarded, revised, or combined, the team can return to the adolescent literacy action rubric for help in revising established

or developing new goals and implementation maps. When the team completes new implementation maps, you may want to meet with the school leadership team (if different) or school or district administrators to discuss the maps and troubleshoot potential challenges related to planned activities, timelines, and needed resources. Once the implementation maps have been finalized, you can update the formal literacy action plan to include a summary of progress toward last year's goals as well as the process used to review and revise the implementation maps, the membership of the literacy leadership team, and a closing narrative that summarizes the major literacy-based activities planned for the next school year.

Step 3: Plan How to Sustain Momentum
One important element is to establish a system of communication that includes school colleagues in addition to parents and individuals in the district office, other schools, and community. When others know that adolescent literacy improvement is a priority for the school, interest in the initiative grows. Targeting communication to the specific audiences of students, teachers, school and district administrators, parents, and the community is helpful. When communicating with members of each group, highlight how they can help and provide resources you would find useful. The literacy brand statement should be visible on all communication. In this way, you build enthusiasm around the literacy improvement initiative.

One helpful activity is to collaboratively complete a "Then, Now, Next" chart (see Figure 9). The team can complete the chart as a team, or team members can facilitate this conversation with departments or grade-level teams, professional learning groups, or the faculty as a whole.

Figure 9. Then, Now, Next Chart

	Then...	Now...	Next...
What students were/are/will be doing			
What teachers were/are/will be doing			
What the school environment was/is/will be like			

Note. This chart is taken from Irvin, J., Meltzer, J., Dean, N., & Mickler, M.J. (2010). *Taking the Lead on Adolescent Literacy: Action Steps for Schoolwide Success.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

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By discussing the columns together and recording the group's observations on the chart, the team creates a powerfully shared vision of sustained momentum and collaboratively rededicates the initiative to a culture of continuous improvement. Results can be summarized and published using the communication system the team has established.

Conclusion

Readers of this series might consider integrating some or all of the eight principles outlined in the Adolescent Literacy position statement as a vehicle for organizing this process. Each article in the Literacy Practices That Adolescents Deserve series offers educators an opportunity to consider how the topic can translate into practice.

This Taking Action Literacy Leadership Process has been field tested in numerous schools during the last decade. We suggest that literacy leaders follow the steps as outlined, but we also acknowledge that some teams and leaders have adapted or modified the steps and tools to suit their individual needs. We designed the process to be flexible to meet the needs of individual teams and schools. Despite how the process is used, we truly hope that it helps to guide improved and sustained literacy support for all adolescents.

Related Resources

Books

Buehl, D. (2011). *Developing readers in the academic disciplines*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Irvin, J., Meltzer, J., Mickler, M.J., Phillips, J., & Dean, N. (2009). *Meeting the challenge of adolescent literacy: Practical ideas for literacy leaders*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Online Resources

www.reading.org/Libraries/books/bk689-appendix-Irvin.pdf—resources for literacy leaders available online

achievethecore.org/page/680/professional-development-list-page—offers modules and visuals to guide literacy professional development

www.choiceliteracy.com/PD2Go.php—site offers video of teaching practices that can be used for professional development conversations and reflections

www.reading.org/Libraries/international/ira-glpd-overview.pdf—an overview of the International Reading Association's international work in literacy leadership and professional development

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