

**English Language Arts Curricula Review Report
Grades 7-12
Natick Public Schools**

English Language Arts Curricula Review Team

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English Language Arts Curricula Review Report

Introduction

During the 2006-2007 school year, the Natick Public Schools was charged with conducting an English Language Arts curricula review of grades seven through twelve. The English Language Arts Curricula Review Team undertook this task as a vehicle to highlight student learning and as a reflective process to review the language and literacy learning environment for our students. This report contains an historical outline of the implementation of Natick Public Schools 7-12 standards-based language and literacy curricula, describes the evaluation process, indicates findings, and makes recommendations for the future.

Historical background

With the advent of the state of Massachusetts Education Reform in 1993, the Natick Public Schools sought to align the language and literacy curriculum with the first ever defined Massachusetts Department of Education curriculum frameworks. Natick High School English Language Arts Department began this process by developing curriculum matrices that outlined standards for each grade level and corresponding learning experiences/resources. The High School ELA Department has conducted a yearly review of these matrices. During the 2003-2004 school year, the district goals focused on clearly articulating the K-12 content learning standards for all students as aligned to the Massachusetts Department of Education curriculum frameworks. The high school reformatted the matrices to list academic expectations for student learning and the middle schools, with the newly created English Language Arts Department Head positions, began the process of listing academic benchmarks and producing a written curriculum document. This work has continued over the past three years.

Curricula Review Process

During the spring of 2007, a grade seven through twelve English Language Arts curricula review was conducted. The multi-faceted review was informed by the National Study of School Evaluation guidelines: Indicators of Schools of Quality Program Evaluation Series (see Appendix A). The district reviewed the grade 7-12 English Language Arts curricula by examining the current Natick Public Schools standards-based curriculum guides with respect to student achievement, in conjunction with instructional systems and organizational systems that are currently in place to support student learning. To facilitate this work, the district convened an English Language Arts curricula team comprised of: the grade 7-12 English Language Arts Department Heads, the Assistant Superintendent, and a contracted evaluation consultant - whose charge was to develop the evaluation process, protocols, and subsequent action steps.

Evaluation Process

The Indicators of Schools of Quality (see below) were used to frame the evaluation process, which consisted of surveys, focus groups, and curricula review team. To best gain the perspective of all constituencies, a survey was developed and conducted for all

grade seven through twelve teachers (n=31), parents (n=39), administrators (n=3), and students (n=392). Focus groups for parents, by grade span - 7-8, 9-10 and 11-12 - using a stratified random sampling, were scheduled and facilitated by our evaluation consultant. (3/80 parents who received a letter of invitation attended the focus group session.) Lastly, grade level teachers and curricula coordinator(s) comprised the curricula review team (n=2 participants/grade level), who reviewed curricula documents. Additionally, we analyzed results of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and TerraNova as data points for indicators of the quality of the student work. These multiple evaluation tools, in order to best triangulate the data points, were developed to gain information on the following:

Evaluation components - Overview, Analysis, Action Steps

(Based on *National Study of School Evaluation* guidelines, Indicators of Schools of Quality: Program Evaluation Series)

Indicators of Schools of Quality (National Study of School Evaluation, 2000)

- Instructional systems, specifically curriculum, instruction, and assessment
 - To what extent is an organized, articulated, up-to-date curriculum in place?
 - To what extent are research-based, best instructional practices being implemented?
 - To what extent are assessments that reflect student learning goals in place, being implemented, and used to inform instruction?
- Organizational systems, specifically leadership, professional development and culture of continuous improvement
 - To what extent is there leadership in place that ensures skillful management of the program, operations, and resources that promote an effective learning environment?
 - To what extent is there a focus on improving teacher skills and capacity to implement the articulated curriculum?
- Quality of the work of the students
 - To what extent do students meet or exceed benchmark expectations of curriculum essentials in the subject under investigation?

Multiple sources of data were used to respond to the indicators, as noted below.

Teacher Profile

Distribution of the years of experience among our 7-12 school faculties:

Years	Teaching	Teaching in Natick
1-5	6	13
6-10	9	6
11-15	4	2
16-20	1	4
>20	13	8

One third of our teachers have less than 5 years teaching experience and one third have more than 15 years teaching experience. These two data points prompted the question: What are the constructs needed to effectively prepare all teachers to teach English Language Arts in the new millennium? Are teachers in Natick trained in the current content and pedagogical constructs to effectively educate our students?

Summary

Professional development offerings need to be crafted for all teachers, and new-to-the-district teachers, to review the language and literacy curricula and resources and to assure teachers have the content understanding for teaching in a standards-based environment. All teachers in Natick need a refresher of the nuances of the language and literacy curricula to provide vertical and horizontal consistency and articulation across grade level and schools. Additionally, the complexity of the standards as outlined in the MA DOE framework, encompassing reading and writing, warrants the need for professional development in both of these areas.

INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEMS

CURRICULUM

- To what extent is an organized, articulated, up-to-date curriculum in place?
 - Indicators
 - curricula aligned with frameworks
 - vertical and horizontal alignment
 - curricula documents accessible, used and current
 - curricula materials current and representative of articulated curriculum

Overview

As was previously stated, in 1993 Natick High School developed and reviewed curriculum matrices for all courses, grades 9-12. During the 2003-2004 school year, the middle school began development on curriculum matrices and continues to refine them. Additionally, since the implementation of the Balanced Literacy Model (See Appendix B) for grades 5-8 in 2004-2005, and grade 9 in 2006-2007, the district has focused on providing a differentiated language and literacy program for all learners, K-9. Students are placed at their instructional reading level for text selection with a focus on identified skills and strategies to support student learning. In grades 10-12, students are placed in academic levels and follow a curriculum sequence.

The consistency to which the curricula documents and Balanced Literacy Model are implemented by classroom teachers supports the students' successful acquisition of reading and comprehension skills and concepts. In concert with understanding the validity of the curricula documents, the evaluation team sought to understand teachers' implementation and familiarity with the documents at their grade level and how teachers supported the articulated curriculum in their classroom.

Analysis

Teacher surveys and open response comments indicated that 92.9% of teachers considered themselves to be strong language and literacy teachers, 91% of middle and high school teachers feel confident using the district ELA curriculum, and have sufficient materials to teach ELA. 100% of middle and high school teachers were familiar with their grade level content standards. In response to whether or not the curriculum was clearly articulated and executable, 63.6 % (middle school) and 81.9% (high school) indicated that they agreed/strongly agreed. 61.9% (middle school) and 44.4% (high school) teachers felt that they were active contributors to the decision making about the curriculum and how it is taught.

Balanced Literacy Model (BLM)

I feel confident understanding the components of the Balanced Literacy Model.

Middle School n=21	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Reading	57%	33%	10%	0%
Writing	43%	38%	14%	5%

High School n=11	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Reading	27.3%	27.3%	36.4%	9.1%
Writing	0%	40%	50%	10%

Note: BLM was implemented in 2004 for grades 5-8, in 2006 for grade 9 only.

While 90% of middle school teachers indicated that they strongly agree/agree that they are confident understanding components of Balanced Literacy, it is important to note that Balanced Literacy Model is only used at grade 9, thus the low percentage of high school respondents agreeing with this statement.

The ELA Curricula Review Team reviewed the curricula documents consisting of pacing guides, curricula grids that outlined standards, curricula resources and assessments. This curricula review provided for a more narrative forum than what the teacher survey reported, with grade level representatives outlining commendable aspects, deficiencies, and action steps.

The Curricula Review Team survey responses indicated that the curriculum is aligned to MA DOE grade level standard, is “somewhat” designed to develop students’ reading, writing, listening, speaking and viewing understandings and skills. The team also indicated that the curriculum enhances students’ experiences to enable them to make connections and develop a framework for language and literacy ideas. When assessing whether or not the curriculum is clearly articulated and enabled students to understand what they should know and be able to do, the team indicated “somewhat or no”. The teams expressed a need for vertical articulation of the student learning goals and experiences. Collaboration amongst and between grade levels and schools emerged as an identified need.

Administrative surveys indicated that 33% of respondents strongly agree that teachers share leadership through a variety of activities.

Analysis of the data indicated that teacher-to-parent communication regarding the ELA curriculum was not consistent. Teachers reported that 78% (middle school) and 61.1% (high school) teachers are comfortable communicating district language and literacy benchmarks to parents. 60% (high school) and 81% (middle school) teachers provide parents with strategies to support the language and literacy learning of their child. Teachers reported that they were fairly/very confident the current communication with parents accurately reflects what students should know and be able to do – 45.5% high school and 61.9% middle school. 55.3% of parents indicated that the curriculum met their child’s needs.

The way in which that communication took place varied. Teacher surveys indicated:

89.5% (middle school) and 54.6% (high school) communicate with parents about current units of study through conferences
31.6% (middle school) and 9.1% (high school) communicate with parents about current units of study through newsletters
73.7 % (middle school) and 18.2% (high school) communicate with parents about current units of study through web page

Parent surveys indicated that:

69.2% assist their child in learning literacy at home
55.3% believe that the language and literacy curriculum meets the their child’s needs
23.7% indicated that they were familiar with the BLM program
43.6% were aware of the language and literacy content standards for which their child was responsible in his/her grade

Trends reported from the open response section of the parent survey and the parent focus group sessions indicated that parents would like more opportunities to understand the programs and expectations for student learning goals – through parent forums, consistency in understanding the content students are studying, newsletters, notes home, focus groups with parents at schools, regular updates of topics covered during the school year. Parents indicated a need to see more consistent progress reports, to have information regarding expectations for levels, and a syllabus for high school classes that outlines objectives and content.

Parents also indicated that they felt technology needed updating, in particular the website and homework site, with the website providing information regarding the programs and supports for home.

Student survey responses indicated that 83.2% felt that learning about literacy was important to them, 91.6 percent indicated that they understood how language and literacy is important to them in the world, 79.6% indicated that learning about literacy was important to them.

Summary – Curriculum

- To what extent is an organized, articulated, up-to-date curriculum in place?

While the curricula documents are aligned with the Massachusetts Department of Education English Language Arts frameworks and indicate a horizontal alignment of the standards for learning, there is an inconsistency in the interpretation and implementation of the standards/benchmarks vertically. Since one educational year supports the next in a student’s educational journey, it is imperative that we spend time coordinating vertical alignment. Surveys and the curricula review team comments indicated that teachers did not feel that the curriculum was clearly articulated or that they had input into the curriculum. Additionally, not all teachers, parents, or students are familiar with the goals for learning. Since the implementation of the BLM, teachers have been using varied materials to support student learning, but the high school still needs more professional development to support this initiative. Teacher/parent communication was an area in need of improvement, as was indicated by teacher, parent and administrative surveys.

Action steps – Curriculum

- Build language and literacy content knowledge of teachers
- Review and revision of language and literacy curriculum guide to provide for clarity and usability
- Provide collaboration time for teacher and curriculum leaders to develop a clearly articulated curriculum guide, that is vertically and horizontally aligned the curriculum benchmarks, thus allowing for consistent content and use of curricula resources
- Improve communication between leadership and teachers regarding the ELA curriculum
- Provide forums for families to gain a greater understanding of curriculum programs and expectations for learning – inclusive of the development of high school syllabi, newsletters, webpage
- Provide a format for consistent reporting of student progress toward stated curriculum standards
- Improve the use of technology integrated into the curriculum

INSTRUCTION

- To what extent are research-based, best instructional practices being implemented?
 - Indicators
 - Instruction aligned with curriculum
 - Instruction employs data-driven decision making
 - Instruction engages student learning
 - Instructional support available for all students
 - Varied instructional strategies employed
 - Instruction promotes self-directed learning

Overview

The 7-12 curricula resources section of the curriculum guides provides guidance for meeting the needs of all learners, outlines instructional supports for language and literacy

content, concepts and skills, and provides opportunities for students to participate in a literature-rich learning environment. The successful implementation of these resources is key to the use of these best instructional practices. As was articulated in the summary of the curriculum, the implementation of these resources needed review. The district has, over the past few years, an articulated district goal to differentiate lessons. We have implemented the Balanced Literacy Model, grades 5-8 in 2004 and grade 9 in 2006, to support differentiation of literary experiences where students are afforded opportunities to read at their instructional level, in a small group setting, with a focus on development of skills and concepts.

Analysis

Teacher survey respondents indicated:

90.9% (high school) and 81 % (middle school) felt confident in their content knowledge and their ability to use that content knowledge to deliver instruction
100% (high school) and 76.2% (middle school) strongly agreed that they used varied instructional strategies in their classroom
72.7% (high school) and 23.8% (middle school) disagree with the statement that students learn language and literacy best in classes with students of mixed abilities
100% (high school) and 52.4% (middle school) strongly agree/agree that students learn language and literacy best in classes with students of similar abilities
81.9% (high school) and 90.9% (middle school teachers) indicated that they are comfortable differentiating instruction for students needing additional work
81.9% (high school) and 95.4% (middle school teachers) indicated that they are comfortable differentiating instruction for students needing more challenging work
54.6% (high school) and 40.9% (middle school) felt that there are sufficient support systems available for students who have difficulty learning language and literacy
45.5 % (high school and middle school) teacher felt that there was sufficient time allocated for language and literacy instruction

While teachers indicate that they use varied instructional strategies in the classroom and are comfortable differentiating lessons, they disagree from middle to high school about heterogeneous grouping.

Student survey respondents strongly agreed/agreed that 79.6% felt confident trying different strategies to help understand the content. 81.7% of student respondents indicated that their language and literacy work was appropriate for them.

The Curricula Review Team respondents indicated “somewhat” to the prompt that the curriculum reflects an understanding of the range of ways that diverse students learn. The middle school team designated “yes” and high school “somewhat” to the prompt, the “curriculum reflects sensitivity to students’ diverse background, experiences, and dispositions”. Additionally, the team indicated that the curriculum was “somewhat” clearly articulated.

One aspect of instructional practices that the Curricula Review Team felt was underutilized was data-driven decision making. The review team indicated “somewhat”

in-depth and comprehensive analysis of student performance had been conducted, “somewhat” that a systematic process for collecting and managing student performance data, and mixed response to the prompt that all pertinent areas of student achievement data had been collected.

Teacher surveys indicated 63.7% high school teachers and 54.5 % agree/strongly agree that they use technology to support literacy instruction. 61.9 % middle school and 81.9% high school respondents indicated that they expose and encourage the use of emerging technologies for literacy learning.

Parent surveys indicated that 59% of respondents felt that their child was sufficiently challenged.

Student surveys indicated that 70.9% were challenged in their language and literacy class, 81.9 % felt confident trying different strategies to help them understand.

Summary – Instruction

- To what extent are research-based, best instructional practices being implemented?

By definition the grades 7-9 Balanced Literacy programs used in the Natick Public Schools are research-based and incorporate best instructional practices. The alignment of the grades 10-12 literacy programs to MA DOE standards indicates the content-based instruction. Teachers and parent comments indicated a need to better articulate the learning experiences of students. More professional development and colleague collaboration to share ideas and best practices is warranted, as are opportunities for teachers to analyze the data of student learning – norm- and criterion-referenced assessments and teacher-created common assessments – all aligned to the learning standards. Opportunities to provide learning experiences for all students within a differentiated environment were also an articulated need. Technology use, specifically to support literacy instruction, was an articulated need from parents and teachers.

Action steps - Instruction

- Provide teachers with data-driven decision making opportunities
 - to gain access to the data points,
 - to use analysis tools to determine areas of curricula and instruction strength and weakness,
 - to analyze teacher-created assessments to inform instruction
- Increase opportunities for all students to be appropriately challenged
- Increase training for teachers in the use of varied instructional strategies to meet the needs of all students
- Increase teacher training to align instructional practices with current best practices and ensure structures to assess use of these
- Improve teacher and student access to technology resources
- Provide forums for parent to gain an understanding of instructional strategies based on student need

ASSESSMENT

- To what extent are assessments that reflect student learning goals in place, being implemented, and used to inform instruction?

Overview

During the 2003-2006 school years, district goals have outlined the process to develop common assessments. While this process has been slow, every content area has at least one teacher-created common assessment, which teachers use to inform instruction. The High School ELA department has used common writing assessments for several years and the middle school implemented core writing prompts during the 2006-2007 school year. During the upcoming school years, the departments will continue to include these important assessments as a vehicle to assess student learning of stated standards. Additionally, the district uses the data points from Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), which is administered in mathematics for grades seven through nine. These assessments informed our look at the Quality of the Work of the Students (the next indicator of school quality.)

Analysis

Teacher survey respondents indicated that 100% usually/sometimes provide students with a variety of opportunities to show their understanding of language and literacy. 81.8% (high school) and 100% (middle school) teachers “usually” use rubrics to evaluate student work and 72.1% (high school) and 55% (middle school) “sometimes” engage in looking at student work with their colleagues. Looking at Student Work is an important vehicle to provide consistency in grading and using student work to inform instruction.

The Curricula Review Team reported:

75% indicated that assessments promote opportunities for each student to reach high levels of accomplishment
71.5% indicated that assessments are provided on a continuous basis and feedback is used as a source of information to improve teaching and learning,
57.1 % used models and exemplars of formative and summative assessments to assist students in planning for learning
57.1% believed that assessments are conducted as an open process to inform students about what they need to know and how they are expected to demonstrate the knowledge

Middle school teacher survey prompt responses are noted below:

Which assessment practices do you use?				
	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Pre-assessment	65%	35%	0%	0%
Informal Formative Assessment	95%	5%	0%	0%
MCAS data	55%	40%	5%	0%
Genre study	90%	0%	5%	5%
Core writing assessments	85%	5%	5%	5%

Teacher-created assessments	85%	15%	0%	0%
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High school teacher survey prompt responses are noted below:

Which assessment practices do you use?				
	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Pre-assessment	63.6%	36.4%	0%	0%
Informal Formative Assessment	90.9%	9.1%	0%	0%
MCAS data	18.2%	36.4%	27.3%	18.2%
Genre study	50%	20%	20%	10%
Core writing assessments	81.8%	18.2%	0%	0%
Teacher-created assessments	100%	0%	0%	0%

These results indicate that most middle and high school teachers usually use teacher-created assessment and core writing assessments. Only 55% (middle school) and 18.2% (high school) “usually” use MCAS data. It is important to use student achievement data to inform next steps in curriculum and instruction.

Parent surveys and focus group trends indicated that 71.8% of the respondents have a good idea of their child’s progress in language and literacy but only 58.7% receive accurate reports of their child’s progress in language and literacy.

Student survey respondents indicated that 92.1% agree that their language and literacy work is appropriate for them and 87.8% indicated that the number of minutes of language and literacy homework they received was just right.

Summary – Assessment

- To what extent are assessments that reflect student learning goals in place, being implemented, and used to inform instruction?

While the use of common assessments has become part of the culture of our K-8 schools, a focus on creating more of these as a tool to assess and inform instruction is needed. As was noted in the **Instruction** section, teachers do not frequently use the data from these teacher-created assessments, or the norm- and criterion-referenced assessments given at the district level. Both teachers and administrators indicated a need to use these tools proactively, and parents indicated the need to receive more accurate reports of their child’s progress in mathematics.

Action steps - Assessment

- Develop more teacher-created common assessments
- Clear articulation of curriculum expectations through development of syllabi – transparent identification of curriculum benchmarks and learning experiences
- Administer assessment(s) more consistently across the school/district
- Continue the use of the Looking at Student Work and Planning protocol to assure consistency in administration and interpretation of the assessments

- Use the data from assessments to inform instruction and progress toward student learning
- Use grade 8-9 meetings to support student transition to the high school
- Use the results of the assessments to assist students and parents in understanding student attainment of stated standards

QUALITY OF THE WORK OF THE STUDENTS

- To what extent do students meet or exceed benchmark expectations of curriculum essentials in the subject are under investigation?

Overview

All aspects of the curricula review process - a clear and articulated curriculum, instructional practices, formal and informal assessments, leadership, communication and professional development are all integral structures to support student learning. In order to accurately assess student progress towards stated standards, a data review of the formative and summative assessments used by teachers is warranted. The norm- and criterion-referenced assessments, coupled with teacher-created common assessments afford the district the opportunity to assess student learning.

Analysis

Longitudinal analysis of MCAS scores over the past four years indicates that students moved towards proficiency – to a greater degree than the state (see graphs, Appendix C). A review of the content strands served to gain an understanding of student progress towards stated standards/benchmarks:

MCAS analysis

English Language Arts, grade 7, Performance Level Results, percentage

	2006 District	State	2005 District	State	2004 District	State	2003 District	State
Advanced	25	10	18	10	16	9	15	8
Proficient	57	55	65	56	66	59	65	57
Needs Imp	14	26	13	27	17	25	17	28
Warning	4	9	4	8	1	7	4	7

Advanced/Proficient percentages increased 10% 2003-2006

English Language Arts, grade 7

Subject Area Subscores on Standard Test, percent

Reporting Category	2006 District	State	2005 District	State	2004 District	State	2003 District	State
Language	74	69	40	36	71	63	68	59
Reading and Lit	78	68	69	60	70	64	71	64
Composition	74	69	76	72	73	69	75	71
Comp -	64	59	66	62	65	62	67	63

Topic dev								
Comp- SEC	89	85	90	86	85	81	86	82
Mult Choice	85	77	84	75	78	72	78	70
Open Resp	66	52	60	51	55	51	58	52
Writing Prompt	74	69	76	72	73	69	75	71

Increase in proficiency scores in language, reading and literature over a 3 year period. Composition scores remained stable.

English Language Arts, grade 8, Performance Level Results, percentage

	2006 District	State
Advanced	14	12
Proficient	73	62
Needs Imp	10	19
Warning	3	7

First year administration, with 87% Advanced/Proficient

English Language Arts, grade 8

Subject Area Subscores on Standard Test, percent

Reporting Category	2006 District	State
Language	83	73
Reading and Lit	74	69
Mult Choice	84	77
Open Resp	58	57

First year of administration, with district scoring above the state in all areas but Open Response

English Language Arts, grade 10, Performance Level Results, percentage

	2006 District	State	2005 District	State	2004 District	State	2003 District	State
Advanced	32	16	32	22	31	19	33	20
Proficient	53	53	41	42	46	44	46	41
Needs Imp	12	24	23	25	18	27	18	28
Warning	2	7	4	11	4	10	3	12

Advanced and Proficient percentages increased from 79% to 85%

English Language Arts, grade 10

Subject Area Subscores on Standard Test, percent

Reporting Category	2006 District	State	2005 District	State	2004 District	State	2003 District	State
Language	82	74	75	73	80	72	76	69

Reading and Lit	80	69	70	67	80	74	74	68
Composition	81	76	81	77	81	77	83	77
Comp - Topic dev	70	65	71	68	70	67	74	67
Comp- SEC	96	91	95	92	97	93	97	92
Mult Choice	87	76	77	74	80	75	79	74
Open Resp	69	57	59	55	81	73	66	58
Writing Prompt	81	76	81	77	81	77	87	77

Language, Reading and Literature continues to make progress while writing scores remained stable or decreased.

Common assessments

During the 2005-2006 school year, the district implemented common writing assessments, 7-12. We have not begun to collect student data at this juncture, as we are determining the reliability of the assessment and scoring. Beginning in 2007, we will collect data on some of these assessments.

Summary – Quality of the Work of the Students

Analysis of data reports from MCAS indicate language, reading and literature as strong areas for the district. Conversely, writing scores have remained flat over the three year span, which indicates a need to improve in this area. During the 2007 school year, data collection will include common writing prompts so as to gain a greater understanding of student writing skills.

Action steps - Quality of the Work of the Students

- Provide more opportunities for teacher use of longitudinal analysis of MCAS, Terra Nova, common assessments by content strand to inform instructional practices
- Use of LASW protocol for consistency in grading benchmark assessments
- Improved teacher analysis and use of school/district rubrics to assess student writing

ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS

LEADERSHIP

- To what extent is there leadership in place that ensures skillful management of the program, operations, and resources that promote an effective learning environment?
 - Indicators
 - monitors progress
 - promotes continuous reflection on practice and student achievement

- actively supports teaching and learning
- promotes and plans for continuous improvement in student achievement

Overview

Leadership is key to the successful implementation of any standards-based curricula. Building administrators are responsible for the supervision and evaluation of the language and literacy learning in their schools. In 2003, a language and literacy department head for each middle school, grades 5-8, was hired to support the implementation of the literacy program and to provide supervision and evaluation of teachers. This work included the development of the curricula documents, modeling of lessons, and collaborative, collegial conversations. A high school department head has been in place for numerous years.

Analysis

Teacher surveys indicated that 72.8% of high school teachers and 91.5% of middle school teachers felt that leadership encourages and supports language and literacy content and teaching practices and 71.1% (high school) and 90% (middle school) teachers receive useful feedback on their instructional practices from their supervisor. Administrator surveys indicated that 100% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that there is strong language and literacy leadership at the site, 100% agreed/strongly agreed that there is supervisor who is responsible for coaching and/or evaluation of teachers, 100% supported implementation of state and national trends in language and literacy, with 83.4% agreed/strongly agreed that teachers share leadership through a variety of activities (e.g., planning teams, peer review.)

Summary - Leadership

There appears to be adequate leadership for language and literacy at the building level, but teachers indicated a need for more useful feedback on instructional practices from their supervisor. Administrative responses suggested that they are able to coach and evaluate teachers to support the curricula, instruction, and assessment goals. More emphasis on this aspect of the leadership role is warranted.

Action steps - Leadership

- Monitor department heads/building administrators in supporting teachers through supervision and evaluation
- Provide documentation for this supervision

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- To what extent is there a focus on improving teacher skills and capacity to implement the articulated curriculum?
 - Indicators
 - Teachers have content and pedagogical knowledge to implement the curriculum
 - Teachers participate in professional development offerings
 - Professional development insures teachers have content knowledge and pedagogical skills

- Professional development provides conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement

Overview – Professional Development

Teacher training for content knowledge and understanding of the curricula materials is a very important aspect of the language and literacy instruction in our schools. Since the fall of 2005, several opportunities for teacher training in these areas have been offered – Guided Reading course, outside consultant, in-district workshops and courses, peer observations.

Analysis – Professional Development

Percentage of responses to the following prompt(s):

High School teacher responses:

Please provide us with some information about your professional development experiences and needs with respect to language and literacy and the teaching of language and literacy. Rate the following support structures the system provides for teaching language and literacy.				
	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Helpful	Not helpful
School based grade level meetings	72.7%	18.2%	9.1%	0%
Classroom demonstrations	27.3%	27.3%	18.2%	27.3%
Courses and workshops offered by the district	0%	27.3%	54.5%	18.2%
Individual meeting with the principal	10%	0%	10%	80%
Individual meetings with the curriculum leader/department chair	36.4%	9.1%	27.3%	27.3%
Grade level meetings with the curriculum leader to support language and literacy instruction and assessment	36.4%	18.2%	9.1%	36.4%

Over one half of respondents indicated that grade level meetings with the curriculum leaders and 90.9% responded that school-based grade level meetings were very helpful or somewhat helpful. Only 27.3% of the respondents indicated that courses and workshops offered by the district were very helpful or somewhat helpful.

Middle school teacher responses:

Please provide us with some information about your professional development experiences and needs with respect to language and literacy and the teaching of language and literacy. Rate the following support structures the system provides for teaching language and literacy.				
	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Helpful	Not helpful
School based grade level meetings	50%	40%	5%	5%
Classroom demonstrations	53%	26%	11%	11%
Courses and workshops offered by the district	42%	47%	11%	0%
Individual meeting with the principal	32%	37%	5%	26%
Individual meetings with the curriculum leader/department chair	50%	39%	11%	0%
Grade level meetings with the curriculum leader to support language and literacy	36%	9%	27%	27%

instruction and assessment				
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Data indicates that 90% of the teachers find the support structures of school based grade level meetings, courses and workshops offered by the district (89%) and individual meetings with the curriculum leaders/department head (89%) to be very helpful or somewhat helpful.

High school teacher responses

Considering all of the language and literacy professional development you have participated in during the last 5 years, how much was each of the following emphasized: Learning how to:				
	Not at all	Little	Some	To great extent
Implement the Balanced Literacy Model - reading	45.5%	18.2%	0%	36.4%
Implement the Balanced Literacy Model – writing	45.5%	36.4%	18.2%	0%
Understand the language and literacy content that I am teaching	27.3%	27.3%	18.2%	27.3%
Teach reading strategies	0%	9.1%	54.5%	36.4%
Teach the writing process	9.1%	9.1%	63.6%	18.2%
Use inquiry/investigative strategies to gain an understanding of students' language and literacy thinking	9.1%	27.3%	36.4%	27.3%
Use technology in language and literacy instruction	36.4%	0%	63.6%	0%
Assess student learning in language and literacy	9.1%	27.3%	45.5%	18.2%
Teach language and literacy in a class that includes students with special needs	45.5%	27.3%	27.3%	0%
Use data to inform instruction	36.4%	54.5%	9.1%	0%

Professional development was somewhat or to a great extent helpful in the areas of teaching reading strategies (90.0%) and writing process (81.8%) while 9.1% of respondents had professional development in how to use data to inform instruction.

Middle school teacher responses

Considering all of the language and literacy professional development you have participated in during the last 5 years, how much was each of the following emphasized: Learning how to:				
	Not at all	Little	Some	To great extent
Implement the Balanced Literacy Model - reading	0%	5%	30%	65%
Implement the Balanced Literacy Model – writing	0%	20%	50%	30%
Understand the language and literacy content that I am teaching	0%	15%	25%	60%
Teach reading strategies	0%	10%	30%	60%
Teach the writing process	0%	5%	25%	65%
Use	15%	25%	45%	15%

inquiry/investigative strategies to gain an understanding of students' language and literacy thinking				
Use technology in language and literacy instruction	35%	50%	15%	0%
Assess student learning in language and literacy	0%	10%	60%	30%
Teach language and literacy in a class that includes students with special needs	15%	25%	45%	15%
Use data to inform instruction	0%	25%	50%	25%

95% and 80% of respondents indicated that they had participated in professional development focused on Implementing the Balanced Literacy Model for reading and writing, 90% of professional development focused on teaching reading strategies and teaching the reading process.

High school teacher responses

What is the total amount of time you have spent on professional development in language and literacy or the teaching of language and literacy over the past five years? (Answer this regardless of whether or not you were teaching in Natick during all those 5 years.)	
None	0%
Less than 6 hours	9.1%
6 to 15 hours	9.1%
16-35 hours	45.5%
More than 35 hours	36.4%

Middle school teacher responses

What is the total amount of time you have spent on professional development in language and literacy or the teaching of language and literacy over the past five years? (Answer this regardless of whether or not you were teaching in Natick during all those 5 years.)	
None	0%
Less than 6 hours	0%
6 to 15 hours	0%
16-35 hours	20%
More than 35 hours	80%

A significant number of teacher respondents, 81.9% (high school) and 100% (middle school teachers) indicated that over the past five years, they have participated in more than 16 hours of professional development.

I am interested in taking a language and literacy content course in:

Topic	High School	Middle School
Reading	80%	70%
Writing	90.9%	80%
Listening	77.8%	65%
Speaking	75%	65%
Viewing (media)	90.9%	76%
Literature	100%	75%

Summary – Professional Development

Clear, focused professional development with the curricula leader was articulated as the most preferred mode for this work. Teachers indicated a need for more content-focused courses coupled with instructional strategies to meet the needs of all learners.

Professional development around the use of data to inform instruction emerged as a need at the high school along with strategies to teach struggling learners.

Action Steps – Professional Development

- Continue to offer language and literacy strategy and content courses
- Use the district early release professional development time to support language and literacy
- Formalize support structures for teacher professional development
- Conduct survey to identify professional development needs and most effective professional development structures.

Summary

While the review of the indicators of school quality provided an opportunity for the Natick Public Schools to reflect on the teaching and learning of language and literacy for our students, it also provided a unique opportunity to highlight next steps to assure a consistent, comprehensive approach to language and literacy for the district, schools, and teachers. Those indicators – an organized, articulated, and executed curriculum; research-based and implemented best instructional practices; formative and summative assessments that reflect student learning goals; organizational systems that support these aspects of student learning; and professional development opportunities that work in concert to assure teacher understanding and implementation of these stated indicators will serve to support substantive student learning.

A team of teachers, curricula coordinators, and building administrators will develop action plans associated with each of the action steps noted above. These action plans will take into account a three-year span for implementation. Evaluations will be conducted each year to assess successful implementation.