STEP Academy
K-3 Local Literacy Plan
2020-2021

STEP Academy's Goal for Literacy Achievement

We believe that literacy is the most essential discipline that we teach and that literacy skills are crucial to our students' academic success; therefore, we are committed to 100% of STEP Academy students reaching grade level reading proficiency by the end of third grade.

STEP Academy's Assumptions and Commitments

Students
- All students can and will learn.
- At STEP Academy, all students will have equal opportunity to learn.

STEP Academy systemically commits to maintaining equal learning opportunity by proactively planning for instructional equality, while seeking out any inequality and committing the resources necessary to remediate it.

Teachers
- Teachers are the number one determinant of student achievement.
- Strong instruction requires the use of research-based, differentiated instructional strategies.
- Highly qualified, licensed core and intervention reading teachers provide the best instruction.
- Instructional practices increase in a collaborative model of teaching literacy that includes professional learning communities, on-going professional development, and coaching.

STEP Academy commits to hiring and nurturing well-prepared, high quality reading teachers, providing the materials and means necessary for high quality instruction, and designing the structure for a growth-minded literacy learning community.

Assessment
- Data drives decisions and programming in a legitimate learning framework.
- Universal screenings and progress monitoring determine success criteria and identify intervention needs in a quality Response to Intervention structure.
- Summative assessments and continual formative assessments guide core classroom instructional decisions in a system that differentiates for learners.

STEP Academy commits to using data to guide decisions related to its differentiated, RtI literacy instructional System.

Minnesota's Requirements

Minnesota Statute 120B.12 requires that all school districts:
- assess students' level of reading proficiency and identify students not yet reading at grade level
- notify and involve parents/guardians of students who are not yet reading at grade level
- intervene and accelerate learning growth for students who are not reading at grade level
- ensure that elementary teachers have appropriate training and support to provide comprehensive, scientifically-based and culturally sensitive instruction
- adopt and post a "Local Literacy Plan" to ensure that all students are reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade by June 1 of each year

STEP Academy commits to following Minnesota Statute 120B.12 with all of its stipulations.

Core Curriculum

STEP Academy uses the *Core Knowledge Language Arts* curriculum through a balanced-literacy approach supported by Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading foundations to teach the Minnesota Graduation English Language Arts Standards.

Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA)
Core Knowledge Language Arts is a comprehensive Kindergarten–Grade 5 program for teaching skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. CKLA also builds students' knowledge and vocabulary in literature, history, geography, and science.

At the primary level, CKLA has two strands: the Skills Strand that focuses on decoding and encoding and the Listening and Learning Strand that focuses on la nguage comprehension.

Skills Strand: Decoding and Encoding
In the Skills Strand, there are 10-12 lesson types per grade in the areas of:
- Systematic Synthetic Phonics
- Handwriting
- Grammar
- Spelling
- Expressive Writing /The Writing Process

A gradual release of responsibility is modeled through each lesson through the sequence of: warm-up, explicit instruction, modeling, group practice, independent practice, and independent application.

Listening & Learning Strand: Language Comprehension
In the Listening & Learning Strand, topics are studied for 2-3 weeks with a single lesson type that spans across grade levels.
- Oral Read-aloud
  - Introduction to Read Aloud
  - Presenting Read Aloud
- Text-based Discussion
  - Comprehension Questions
  - Word Work
- Extension Activities that Provide Students with the Opportunity to use New Language and Concepts

Core Knowledge Language Arts Curriculum
CKLA provides early, systematic instruction in phonics. Unless decoding is automatic, there is little cognitive capacity to think about meaning. In addition, students are taught reliable decoding skills because they are more efficient than context cues.

The Core Knowledge approach is to specify, in a clear sequence, what students need to know; therefore, CKLA teaches children the distinction between sounds and spellings using the most frequent or least ambiguous sounds first ascribing to a logical progression of skill development.

CKLA gives intensive practice to build reliability and automaticity. Intensive practice is achieved through multiple opportunities for learning through various activities and instructional techniques.

Throughout the learning opportunities, areas of common confusion are highlighted and students practice making distinctions between similar letters, sounds, and word patterns.

CKLA uses read-alouds to support oral language skills that *underlie and parallel* reading and writing skills. The progression of academic and literary based read-alouds adds to students' vocabulary development because written language uses richer vocabulary than spoken language. A T.G. Stict study (1974, 1984) showed that students' listening comprehension is markedly stronger than their reading comprehension in every grade level up to their first year in college. CKLA uses early read-alouds (and later, knowledge-building complex texts) to provide a strong foundation of background knowledge helping students remove ambiguity when they begin to gain meaning during their own reading.

According to the *Core Knowledge Standards for English, Language Arts, and Literacy in History, Science, Social Studies, and Technical Subjects*, "Building knowledge systematically in English language arts is like giving children various pieces of a puzzle in each grade that, over time, will form one big picture. At a curricular or instructional level, texts—within and across grade levels—need to be selected around topics or themes that systematically develop the knowledge base of students." CKLA systematically builds knowledge. Knowledge builds on knowledge. All of our most desirable goals for education are all knowledge dependent. Knowing things, or having background knowledge, allows students to reserve cognitive capacity for higher levels of thinking.

Finally, CKLA stays on topic to foster the most efficient word learning. Most vocabulary is learned implicitly. Word learning is most efficient when the reader already understands the context well. CKLA allows students to make tiny gains on many words at a time rather than huge gains on one word at a time through the building of webs of words in theme domains. Then, domain webs are connected when later knowledge-based themes emerge.

STEP Academy believes that the Core Knowledge Language Arts Curriculum provides a foundation of understanding that our first generation Somali immigrant students need in order to be successful readers and learners by the end of third grade.

Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading
Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading suggests that teachers meet students where they are and lead them forward with intention and precision through a responsive teaching process. STEP Academy uses a Fountas and Pinnell philosophy-based guided reading system to provide small group guided reading instruction for students who have begun to read. As suggested by the authors, this guided reading is only one element in STEP Academy's high quality reading program that includes several instructional contexts.

An initial critical component of guided reading is determining students' reading levels, grouping students of like-levels, and choosing instructional level texts to use for each lesson. These texts should be complex and provide the challenge students need to boost their reading power when supported with explicit instruction. Teachers need to guide students, not just in reading difficult words, but in the thinking that they engage in while reading. Teachers must use text characteristics and how a text requires a reader to think to help students construct meaning through powerful introductions and rich discussions.

According to Fountas and Pinnell, the primary reason for guided reading is to develop generative learning that can be applied across texts. The planning of lessons that match the needs of each guided reading group becomes a critical part of the small group instruction. After the initial level designation, teachers begin to make observations of students' reading behaviors and

understandings. Then, lessons are planned based on those observations and a pattern of responsive teaching is engaged.

Balanced Literacy

Balanced Literacy focuses on developing each student's ability to read, write, listen, and speak effectively (Frey, Lee, Tollefson, Pass, & Massengill, 2005). The Balanced Literacy Model focuses on five components that are critical to student literacy growth: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Students are challenged with increasingly complex texts combined with a gradual release of responsibility model of instruction (Duke & Pearson 2002). During a minimum of 120-minute literacy period daily, teachers regularly assess students' progress and meet with guided literacy groups at their instructional levels.

STEP Academy values students' emerging independence as readers. As such, developmentally appropriate independent literacy practices are explicitly taught and practiced. Students are supported to build skills through reading to self, reading to someone, working on writing, listening to reading, and working on word work.

Balanced Reading instruction at STEP Academy is regularly examined for alignment with student needs as identified by data. In addition, STEP Academy routinely reviews curriculum to ensure continual grounding in the Minnesota English Language Arts Standards. Curriculum review and alignment is facilitated by stakeholder representation including: school leaders, core reading teachers, intervention reading teachers, and special education teachers.

Multi-Tiered System of Support

STEP Academy adheres to a Response to Intervention (RtI), multi-tiered system of support intervention model. This model offers high quality, differentiated instruction and reading intervention to students falling within specific ranges of proficiency as determined by local benchmark assessments that are aligned with the state English Language Arts Standards. Effective reading intervention addresses the needs of all students who struggle, and STEP Academy does this.

All students receive differentiated core instruction, using the Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) program and Fountas and Pinnell-based guided reading. Students who show slow mastery of standards receive re-teaching through teacher intervention using CKLA resources and responsive teacher instruction at their independent reading level.

An RtI framework is used to structure intervention services and progress monitor students with more need than is appropriate for general classroom support. STEP Academy screens to identify at-risk students at minimum three times per year. Students exhibiting higher need receive small-group support in addition to their classroom guided reading instruction. A trained and licensed reading teacher provides this instruction using PRESS and/or Fountas and Pinnell's Leveled Literacy Instruction (LLI) program along with diagnostic supports. Reading teachers monitor progress of their intervention students and adjust the instructional intensity as is appropriate according to collected data.

The multi-tiered system of support is monitored by the Dean of Instruction and Assistant Director of Academics. Professional Learning Community meetings, collaborative time, and bi-weekly coaching meetings with the Literacy Coordinator are provided for teachers in order for

them to increase their professional practice in regards to planning instruction through the use of data and individual student needs.

Assessment

STEP Academy believes that assessments are an integral part of teaching and learning. In that regard, a balanced assessment system is used to provide the most holistic results. Data is captured in assessment of and for learning, both summative and formative. These assessments address instructional, accountability, and learning needs. This assessment system allows STEP Academy staff to plan learning, support learning, monitor learning, and verify learning. In addition to the assessments listed below, STEP Academy teachers use CKLA assessments, standards-based assessments, and numerous formative assessment methods to gather and use data related to student learning.

Assessment	Reason	Population	Date
FastBridge aReading*	Determine student "on grade level" status, measure student growth	Grades 1-3	Winter
Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System*	Universal assessment to determine intervention placement, benchmark to determine students' current reading level, Used to determine "on grade level" status	Grades K-3	Winter
FastBridge Early Reading*	Universal assessment to determine intervention placement, Determine student "on grade level" status for Kindergarten only	Grade K	Winter
Leveled Literacy Intervention Running Records	Monitor student progress for reading intervention purposes	Grades K-3	Weekly
MCA- Reading	Consider overall proficiency of students in relation to Minnesota Graduation Standards, measure student growth, evaluate effectiveness of programs, determine intervention placement	Grades 3-8, 10	Spring
WIDA Screening ELL Placement- Speaking, Listening, Reading, & Writing	Determine placement in ELL Instruction	ELL Candidates	On-going
Access/WIDA- Speaking, Listening, Reading, & Writing	Monitor student progress in acquiring academic English, determine when students identified as EL are ready to exit the program, evaluate effectiveness of programs	ELL Students K-12	Winter

*Assessment is used to determine "at grade level" status for MDE Read Well by Third Grade Report

Professional Development

Professional development opportunities for elementary teachers include:
- Collaboration time: Open time when teachers are able to choose their collaborative partners and topics of their meetings
- Professional Learning Community Meetings
- School staff development days
- Administrative support: Assistant Director of Academics, Dean of Instruction

According to the International Reading Association in their publication, *Excellent Reading Teachers: A Position Statement of the International Reading Association* from 2000, the following are standards of excellent reading teachers. STEP Academy uses these principles as guiding expectations for our teachers.
- They understand reading and writing development, and believe all children can learn to read and write.
- They continually assess children's individual progress and relate reading instruction to children's previous experiences.
- They know a variety of ways to teach reading, when to use each method, and how to combine the methods into an effective instructional program.
- They offer a variety of materials and texts for children to read.
- They use flexible grouping strategies to tailor instruction to individual students.
- They are good reading "coaches" (that is, they provide help strategically).

Parent and Community Involvement

Communication and building partnerships with parents and families is a priority for STEP Academy. We are always refining our system of on-going communication in order to best meet the needs of our Somali immigrant community.

In Somalia, students are sent to school and there is no communication between the parent and the school. Our first challenge to strong parental involvement is educating parents that continued communication with the school is valuable and expected. This is done through day-to-day conversations with our Director or Family Liaison when parents drop off or pick up their children, at Open House, and at evening monthly PTO events put on by the school.

Many of our parents do not speak English well and are illiterate in their home language, Somali, which was just adopted as a written language in 1972. For that reason, we have a number of staff members who regularly act as interpreters for families when they visit the school. However, this fact impacts all school to home communication because written progress reports, newsletters, and other communication are inaccessible for many parents unless their child is able and willing to translate.

Conference attendance is a challenge for some of our families as well. A majority of our families are living in poverty. This means that transportation can be a problem. STEP Academy's Family Liaison does arrange transportation for families who need it, but not all families communicate their need for that support. In addition, some parents have communicated a challenge with asking for time off of work.

STEP Academy has an open door policy with parents. They are able to come in any time and someone at school will meet with them. Often during these times, progress information for all of their children in attendance at the school is shared and any concerns are documented and shared with teachers. For 2020-2021, while in a Distance Learning Model, parents are encouraged to call or set up a Google Meet with school representatives and teachers. The plan is to still hold on site conferences wherever possible.

Goals and Measurable Objectives

STEP Academy has identified initial goals and measurable objectives for the 2020-2021 school year.

1. Core Instruction
Goal: 60% of students in grades K-3 will score at the Meets or Exceeds level on the End of Year Benchmark Reading Assessment in the spring of 2020-2021.

Measurable Objectives: Benchmark Reading Assessment scores

2. Intervention
Goal: Redefine and adapt reading intervention strategies in order to maximize intervention support in a distance learning model.

Measurable Objective: Common data reports and graphs will be available at Student Success Team meetings, and program evaluative conversations will take place at least quarterly at SST meetings. Results from these evaluations will be followed up with modification to intervention practices.

3. Staff Development
Goal: Redefine and adapt reading instructional strategies in order to maximize reading instruction in a distance learning model.

Measurable Objective: Teachers at all grade levels will be provided PLC meeting times, collaborative times, coaching, and professional development that will provide on-going support and training.

4. Assessment
Goal: Redefine and adapt reading assessment strategies in order to gather data in a distance learning model.

Measurable Objectives: Teachers and admin will measure effectiveness of programming by conducting quarterly check ins that result in revision of assessment practices.

5. Parent and Community Involvement
Goal: Involve parents in supporting their children's learning experience in order to have all students reading well by third grade in a distance learning model.

Measurable Objectives: STEP Academy will maintain and grow new methods for communicating with parents. In addition, whenever possible, the school will prioritize continued in person conferences with parents as are scheduled in regular school years.