Professional Learning Community Facilitation Guide:

Balanced Reading Diet

West Virginia Department of Education
Division of Teaching and Learning

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Introduction

As part of the One Voice. One Focus. All Students Achieving vision plan, West Virginia schools provide a statewide early childhood focus where we teach every child to read, on grade level, by third grade. The WVDE is moving forward with the West Virginia Leaders of Literacy: Campaign for Grade Level Reading through a comprehensive approach to early literacy that includes an emphasis on all content areas of development in school, as well as strengthening school readiness efforts, promoting positive attendance patterns, and providing access to high-quality, sustained extended day and extended year learning opportunities.”

Each county in West Virginia has developed a formal plan to address the underlying challenges that can keep young children, especially those from low-income families, from learning to read well:

- School readiness - too many children are entering kindergarten already behind
- School attendance - too many children are missing too many days of school
- Extended learning opportunities - too many children are losing ground academically over the summer
- High quality instruction – while schools cannot do it alone, there is an obligation to support increased teacher expertise which is the factor most closely related to student achievement

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) materials were created for counties and schools to use as part of their efforts to support teacher expertise and ultimately improve upon high quality instruction. The intent of these documents is to provide guidance for teachers seeking to learn more about instruction around foundational reading skills. The editors of these documents hope that teachers feel supported in their endeavors to improve reading instruction for West Virginia children.
Balanced Reading Diet PLC

The Balanced Reading Diet provides a suggested framework for English Language Arts instruction that can be used in conjunction with any curriculum and resources. This course will focus on the Balanced Reading Diet and the essentials to successful reading: phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, vocabulary instruction, fluency, and comprehension strategies. You will understand the importance of each component and their place in the reading diet. Additionally, you will learn to identify and assess the skills specific to the Balanced Reading Diet. Readings, resources, and activities will provide strategies and instructional practices to support each of the components. Throughout the course, you will evaluate your current teaching practices and learn strategies for effectively developing your students’ phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension skills.
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Session 1: An Overview of a Balanced Reading Diet

**Overview:** This session will introduce the Balanced Reading Diet. During this session, you will view one video presentation and read three articles to help you better understand the components of the balanced reading diet. After reflecting on your current practice, you will complete a project that demonstrates your understanding. By the end of the session you will be able to name the skills that make up the balanced reading diet and identify strategies for instruction.

**Goals:** In this session you will...
- understand the purpose, importance, and components of a Balanced Reading Diet,
- identify ways to integrate the balanced reading components into daily classroom activity, and
- reflect upon your classroom environment and teaching strategies pertaining to the Balanced Reading Diet.

**Potential PLC Activities:**
- Read and discuss Balanced Reading Diet at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWqgyQ96Kal](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWqgyQ96Kal)  
  This one-hour video, narrated by Charlotte Webb of the WV Dept of Education, provides an overview of the components of a Balanced Reading Diet. Each component is defined and examples of instructional strategies are provided. View minutes 6:50 through 11:10 for specific information on the purpose and importance of providing a Balanced Reading Diet in your classroom.
- Read and discuss Introduction for the Food Groups for Literacy at [http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/balancedliteracydiet/Food_Groups/](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/balancedliteracydiet/Food_Groups/)  
  This article, posted on the Melissa Institute Literacy Website, provides an introduction into the food groups for literacy. It also includes the Reading Pyramid as well as the Writing Pyramid with further descriptions of each component of the Balanced Reading Diet. Other areas of the website may be explored for additional information.
- Read and discuss Using a food pyramid concept to cut through the great debate over phonics vs. whole language at [http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=10604](http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=10604)  
  Dale Willows provides an administrator’s point of view with the Balanced Reading Diet. The article details student needs, as well as teacher training and implementation of the Balanced Reading Diet. The article also details what administrators can do to support implementation.
  In this article, Cindy Perras, M.Ed.,OCT, discusses the importance of a Balanced Reading Diet in the classroom. Each of the components of the Reading Pyramid are discussed and reviewed for further understanding. Focus on Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Spelling and Word Study, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension Strategies. Grade-level specific virtual tours of literacy-rich classrooms are embedded at the bottom of this article.
- Visit the website found in Reading #4. Read the article, then, at the bottom of the page, select the grade-level that you currently teach. Choose and view at least one virtual tour, based on your current grade level, to gain greater insight into a literacy-rich classroom. Describe what you see in the classroom. Reflect on the components of the tour that you currently incorporate. What would you like to add to your current teaching practice?
Discussions:

- Reflect upon why it is important for all teachers to have strategies in place to support literacy. Take note of information you are already integrating into your instruction and what new information you learned that you will use to change the reading instruction you provide in the future.
- Reflect upon the purpose of a Balanced Reading Diet in the classroom and why it is important. Based on your current grade-level, how will you expand upon your current reading instruction? What challenges do you foresee as you begin to implement these strategies?

Session 2: Emergent Readers

Overview: The Emergent Reader Diet is appropriate for teaching pre-readers, and therefore differs from the Beginning Reader Diet that will be emphasized for the remainder of this course. This session will focus on the skills that are specific to an Emergent Reader Diet: alphabet, concept of print, and concept of word. Throughout the session you will read about these components and watch videos with examples of assessments. You will be given an opportunity to choose one skill, and practice assessing that skill with one of your current students. The culminating project will have you identify activities that lend themselves to the mastery of each component. By the end of the session, you will be able to confidently plan instruction for an Emergent Reader Diet.

Goals: In this session you will...

- understand the components that make up the Emergent Reader Diet,
- learn strategies for alphabet, concept of print, and concept of word instruction, and
- understand and reflect upon the indicators of emergent readers.

Potential PLC Activities:

  The Texas Education Agency discuss the importance of the alphabetic principle. Children’s knowledge of letter names and shapes is a strong predictor of their success in learning to read. Knowing letter names is strongly related to children’s ability to remember the forms of written words and their ability to treat words as sequences of letters. This article gives suggestions about the pacing and sequencing of alphabet instruction.

  The Texas Education Agency discuss the importance of print awareness. Print awareness is a child’s earliest understanding that written language carries meaning. The foundation of all other literacy learning builds upon this knowledge. This article is comprised of guidelines for teachers in how to promote print awareness and a sample activity for assessing print awareness in young children.

  Rainey Blackwell-Bullock, Marcia Invernizzi, E. Allison Drake, and Jennifer L. Howell are the authors of this article discussing concept of word. A student’s concept of word (COW) in text serves as a reliable indicator of their success as a reader. Research shows that concept of word development serves as a valid kindergarten predictor of first grade reading achievement. This article defines concept of word and explains how to assess it.
• Read and discuss Stable Concept of Word at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dD9397jOsQ
  This short clip shows an example of a child being assessed on concept of word. The child
  reads a popular nursery rhyme and points to each word as it is recited. Notice that he does not
  move his hand with each syllable, but only with each word.

• Read and discuss Emergent Readers at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-d22EIGtw
  This one-hour video, presented by Charlotte Webb of the WV Dept of Ed., provides an overview
  of the Emergent Reader Diet. Minutes 28:27-31:06 focus on concept of word. Minutes 31:11-
  32:15 focus on concept of print. Minutes 32:15-36:20 focus on the alphabet. These skills are
  defined with examples to clarify the concepts.

• Read and view resources 1-4. Alphabet, concept of print, and concept of word are all skills that
  need to be mastered before moving past the Emergent Reader Diet. Once you have reviewed
  resources #1-4, choose a skill (alphabet, concept of print, or concept of word) and assess your
  students on that skill. Name and provide a detailed description of the skill that you assessed.
  Discuss the results and details of the assessment.

Discussions:
• Discuss specific strategies that make up each component of an Emergent Reader Diet.
• Discuss your group activity. Did your students master that skill? What strategies would these
  students move toward mastery? Once they have mastered that, what skill will you work on
  next?

Session 3: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness

Overview: This session aims to define the differences between phonics and phonemic awareness.
Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of phonics instruction in the development of reading skills.
During this session, you will view a clip of a presentation about word study, phonics, and phonemic
awareness. You will also read three articles dedicated to phonological awareness, phonemic
awareness, and phonics. After reviewing all the resources, you will have compiled a list of appropriate
strategies for phonics and phonemic awareness instruction. The culminating project will ask you to
choose one strategy per skill and defend why it will be a beneficial strategy to use in your classroom.

Goals: In this session you will…
• understand the importance of phonics and phonemic awareness in the Balanced Reading Diet,
• learn a variety of instructional methods for phonics and phonemic awareness, and
• utilize new strategies for phonics and phonemic awareness.

Potential PLC Activities:
• Read and discuss Word Study - Phonics and Phonemic Awareness at
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKEZui9woxU
  This PowerPoint presentation, by Charlotte Webb of the WV Department of Education,
  addresses phonics and phonemic awareness instruction. Word Study is discussed as a way to
  teach to teach these skills. You only need to view minutes 5:05-8:32.
• Read and discuss Phonological Awareness is Child’s Play! at https://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200901/BTJPhonologicalAwareness.pdf
In this article, Hallie Kay Yopp and Ruth Helen Yopp explain that children need to be phonologically aware before they can begin decoding and encoding words. This article highlights the importance of practicing phonological awareness in the early childhood classroom as well as a simple definition of the concept. You will read about several strategies and games to help your students develop phonological awareness.

• Read and discuss The Importance of Phonemic Awareness in Learning to Read at http://www.sedl.org/pubs/sedl-letter/v14n03/3.html
Wesley A. Hoover explains that phonemic awareness is a critical skill necessary to be able to read an alphabetically written language. However, there is still confusion around this concept for many educators. This article will answer the following questions: What is phonemic awareness? Why is it a critical skill needed to learn reading? Why is it a difficult skill for children to acquire?

• Read and discuss Understanding Phonics: Basic information you need to know before teaching phonics at http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/understanding-phonics
Before delving into phonics instruction, it is important to understand the basics surrounding the topic. In this brief article the author defines phonics, explains why phonics instruction is important, and suggests ways to structure phonics instruction. Additionally, the difference between phonemic awareness and phonics instruction is emphasized.

• Using the information gained from the videos and the readings, complete a chart providing at least five different strategies and their descriptions for each of the skills discussed in this session (phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonics).

Discussions:
• Phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonics are important for educators to understand; however, it is also important for families to understand the importance of these skills in preparation for learning to read. How would you communicate to families the importance of working on these skills at the home? Consider the differences in these skills, the importance of teaching them, and ways they can be promoted at home.

• Reflect upon how you address these skills in your classrooms.
Session 4: Vocabulary

**Overview:** This session focuses on the importance of vocabulary and vocabulary development strategies in the classroom. In this session, you will read and view a variety of resources focusing on vocabulary instruction. During this session, you will reflect upon your current vocabulary instruction and try a new strategy. You will participate in discussions explaining how you would implement the strategy and outlining why this would be effective. You will also discuss the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction to young readers. As a final project you will choose three vocabulary instruction techniques you would like to learn more about and implement them in your classroom.

**Goals:** In this session you will...
- understand the importance of vocabulary instruction,
- learn strategies for vocabulary development, and
- understand and reflect upon your teaching practice and how it can be improved in regards to vocabulary instruction.

**Potential PLC Activities:**
  Vocabulary instruction is crucial to the comprehension of text for young readers. Rebecca Alber, blog contributor for Edutopia, discusses the must-dos for teachers when approaching vocabulary in the classroom. This article provides great tips to provide high quality vocabulary instruction.
  Janelle Cox discusses the importance of vocabulary instruction in the elementary grades. In this article, she highlights five strategies that could be valuable to elementary level teachers and students. The five strategies discussed are semantic maps, word wizard, word detective, word connect, and concept cube.
- Read and discuss Vocabulary Instruction at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltSJtcoOLf0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltSJtcoOLf0)
  In this clip, Dr. Isabel Beck discusses what good vocabulary instruction looks like in the classroom. She is a professor of education and senior scientist at the University of Pittsburgh where she teaches reading education courses and conducts reading research. She has also engaged in extensive research on decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension, and has published her work in over 100 articles and chapters, as well as in several books.
- Read and discuss Vocabulary Instruction, 2nd Grade at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fr7yRYegjb8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fr7yRYegjb8)
  In this clip, Dr. Anita Archer demonstrates explicit vocabulary instruction. She demonstrates this instruction through read-alouds with a group of second grade students. Dr. Archer models best practices in reading instruction specific to vocabulary as well as classroom management.
- View the clips of Anita Archer, Reading #4, demonstrating explicit vocabulary instruction. While viewing the video, pay attention to the strategies she uses. What instructional steps were used to introduce the vocabulary word? What other effective instructional practices did you observe? How do these steps correspond to your current vocabulary instruction? How might you use the strategies from the video in your own classrooms?
Discussions:

- Reflect upon your current vocabulary instruction. How is it effective? What can you do to improve your vocabulary teaching practices?
- Why is explicit vocabulary instruction crucial to young readers?
- Reflect on the readings and videos. Discuss some techniques you would like to learn more about and how you might implement them in your classrooms.

Session 5: Fluency

Overview: Fluency is an important component of the Balanced Reading Diet. In this session, you will learn strategies for developing fluent readers and reflect upon your current fluency instructional practices. During this session, you will read and view a variety of resources on the importance of fluency. You will participate in discussions and complete a final project explaining why the largest amount of instructional time in the balanced reading diet is dedicated to fluency. By the end of this session you will understand the important role fluency plays in a Balanced Reading Diet, and you will be able to implement strategies to foster fluent readers.

Goals: In this session you will…

- understand the importance of fluency in the balanced reading diet,
- learn strategies for developing fluent readers, and
- reflect upon current fluency practices.

Potential PLC Activities:

- Read and discuss Big Ideas in Beginning Reading at http://reading.uoregon.edu/big_ideas/flu/flu_what.php
  This article, provided by the University of Oregon, discusses fluency concepts and research. The discussion includes definitions, points to remember, what teachers should know and be able to do, what research says, and the importance of focusing on fluency. Videos are included at the end of the article that address the need for fluency instruction.

- Read and discuss What Works in Fluency Instruction at http://www.readingrockets.org/article/what-works-fluency-instruction
  The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development tells us that fluency is one of several factors necessary for skilled reading. This article discusses the two most common instructional methods for developing fluency: guided oral reading and independent silent reading. You will read about the benefits of both methods and the best ways for them to be implemented.

  According to Logan De Lay, fluency is more than just reading with speed. Prosody is the defining feature of expressive reading and should be emphasized in the elementary classroom. This article defines prosody as a foundational skill for reading and offers research to support why it should be taught and assessed in the classroom. Suggested strategies are included to help teachers encourage practice in expressive reading.
• Read and discuss Reading Fluency and Expression at http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/balancedliteracydiet/Reading_Fluency_Expression.html
In this article, published by The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, explains what fluent readers do well. Fluent readers recognize words quickly, and do not have to concentrate on figuring out each word. Therefore, they can focus on the meaning of the words. It is important for teachers to offer many opportunities for students to practice reading with appropriate pace and expression. This website offers expert advice on why teachers should be implementing fluency instruction as well as ways in which they can teach and assess fluency.

• View the following videos posted on the website published by The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. How would you implement these strategies in your classroom?

   Fluency Phones
   Often, students have a hard time hearing themselves in a busy classroom. Fluency phones help to augment the sound of the child’s own voice.

   Reader’s Theater
   Reader’s Theater promotes speed, proper expression, and accuracy in reading by having students repeatedly read a theatrical adaptation of a text.

   Choral Reading
   The goal is for students to improve reading fluency and expression by repeatedly reading a text together as a group.

Discussions:
• Why should the largest amount of instructional time in the Balanced Reading Diet be dedicated to fluency? Describe in detail the methods you use to improve student fluency. Reflect upon the pros and cons of using oral reading and silent reading using classroom examples to support your claims.

Session 6: Comprehension

Overview: This session focuses on the importance of comprehension in the Balanced Reading Diet. In this session, you will learn strategies for developing successful comprehension skills and reflect upon your current comprehension instructional practices. During this session, you will read and view a variety of resources on the importance of comprehension, review comprehension strategies from the readings, and consider qualities of good readers versus poor readers. As a final project, you will choose comprehension strategies that interest you, implement one in your classroom, and reflect on the results. By the end of this session, you will understand the important role comprehension plays in a Balanced Reading Diet and will gain knowledge of comprehension techniques for your classroom.

Goals: In this session you will…
• understand the importance of comprehension in the Balanced Reading Diet,
• learn strategies for developing successful comprehension skills, and
• reflect upon current comprehension practices.
Potential PLC Activities:

  The purpose of reading is comprehension. This article, from the Texas Education Agency, discusses the research behind reading and comprehension and discusses what good readers do as they read. The final section of the article addresses how poor readers differ from good readers.

- Read and discuss Understanding Reading Comprehension at http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/understanding-reading-comprehension
  In this article, Jeff Wilhelm offers a simple and complex definition of comprehension. Also included are processes and strategies that are required to be an active constructor of meaning as a reader. Finally, examples of strategies for teachers are offered to supplement reading instruction.

- Read and discuss Key Comprehension Strategies to Teach at http://www.readingrockets.org/article/key-comprehension-strategies-teach
  Studies on good readers have identified a number of comprehension strategies to be highly useful. This article, from the Texas Education Agency, highlights seven strategies that lend themselves well to comprehension instruction. These strategies are discussed in detail.

- Read and discuss Comprehension Strategies at https://sway.com/HcJMP5Tkm7CHub4L
  This is a collection of resources compiled by the West Virginia Department of Education. There are 8 different strategies listed. Each strategy is a link that will take you to other resources.

- Read and discuss Recommendations for improving reading comprehension in K-3 at http://www.ernweb.com/educational-research-articles/5_recommendations_for_improving_reading_comprehension_in_k3/
  The Educational Research website lists and describes 5 recommendations for improving reading comprehension for grades K-3. Included are examples of effective instructional practices and classroom activities. Each recommendation includes a rating of the research supporting it.

- Read readings #2-4. Make note of three comprehension strategies from the readings that are unfamiliar or particularly interesting. Discuss the strategies and brainstorm ways you can implement them in your classrooms. How will these benefit your students?

Discussions:

- Consider the indicators listed in resource #1 for good readers and for poor readers. Pause and think about your current students. Do any of them have these qualities?
- Discuss the differences in ‘good readers’ versus ‘poor readers’. According to the reading, do your statistically proficient readers demonstrate the skills typical to “good readers”? Do your students who are statistically underachieving demonstrate the skills typical to “poor readers”?
- What are some comprehension strategies that you currently use and teach in your classroom? Are these effective and beneficial to your students? If not, what new ones will you try?