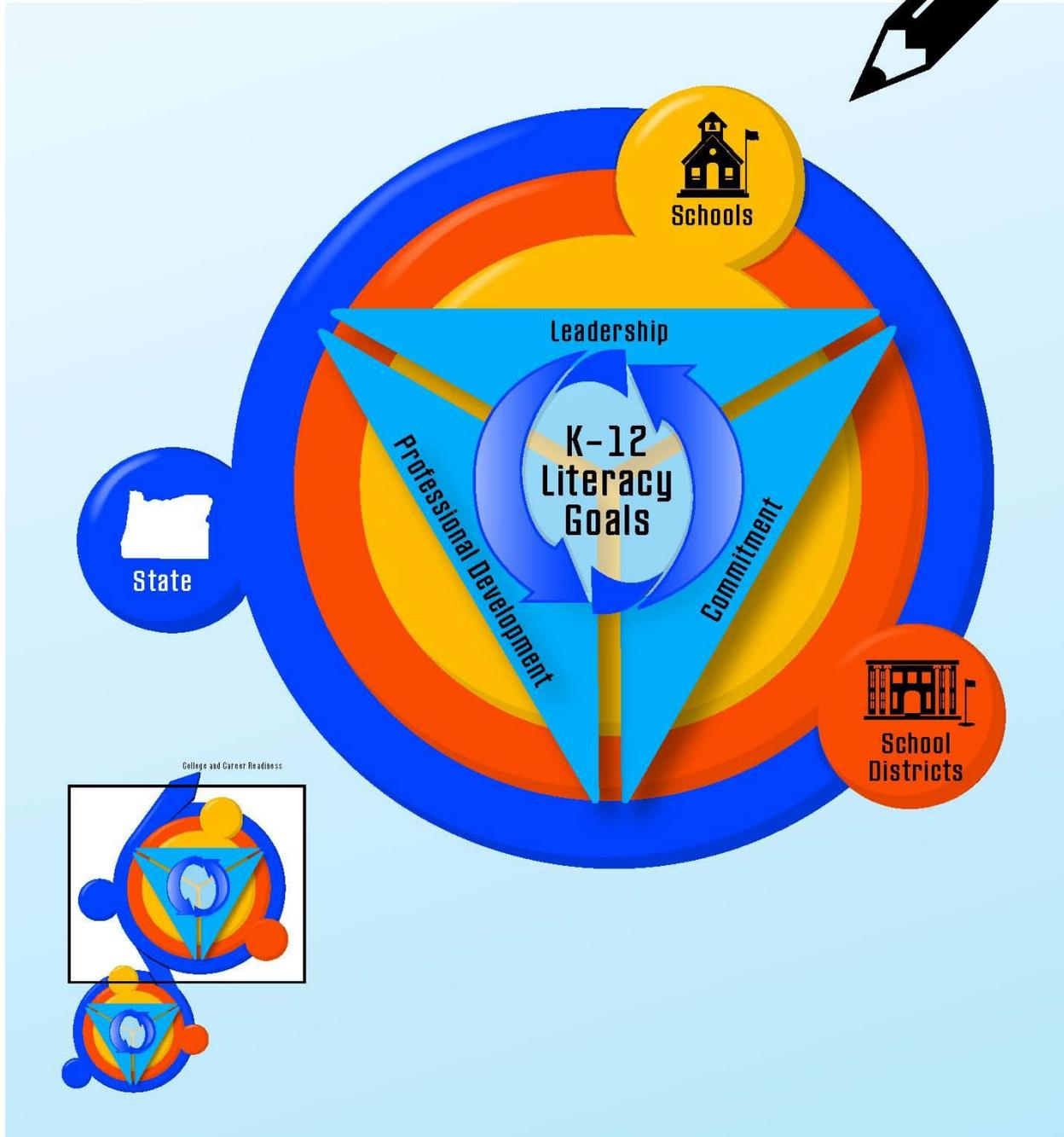


Oregon Literacy Plan: K-12 Writing



Oregon Literacy Plan: K–12 Writing

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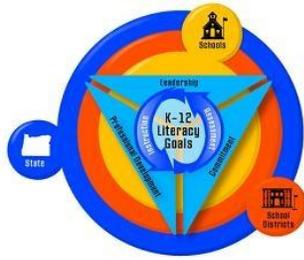
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K-12 Writing

Oregon Literacy Plan

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Introduction: Framework and Implementation

(1) Framework

Writing well matters. It matters in *any* academic setting and it matters in *any* academic discipline. It also matters in a growing number of work environments where doing *any* job effectively requires employees to communicate clearly and precisely through print.

A national survey of 120 major American corporations employing nearly 8 million individuals concluded that “*writing is a ticket to professional opportunity, while poorly written job applications are a figurative kiss of death. Writing is a “threshold skill” for both employment and promotion* (National Commission on Writing, 2004, p. 3). Estimates based on the survey returns reveal that employers spend billions annually correcting writing deficiencies. The survey found that people who *cannot* write well and *cannot* communicate clearly are much *less likely* to be hired for *any* job in the first place, and, if they are hired, they are much *less likely* to stay on the job long enough to be considered for promotion. The report also concludes that **students who want to enter the workforce immediately after finishing high school need to write as well as students entering college**, given that both universities and employers now seek the same core writing skills (ACT, Inc., 2006).

The College Board summarized a series of validity studies conducted on the SAT and found that the **writing portion of the SAT was a better predictor of performance in the first year of college than either the mathematics or critical reading portions** (Kobrin, Patterson, Shaw, Mattern, & Barbuti, 2008). This prediction pattern was true for all groups of students, regardless of race or ethnicity. The Board suggested **writing** was predictive of first-year college success because writing is the means by which students are evaluated in nearly every postsecondary course.

Teaching students to write effectively should be a major instructional objective in K-12 schools. Throughout *elementary*, *middle*, and *high school*, a comprehensive writing curriculum organized around two distinct but complementary roles (Graham & Perrin, 2007) will improve writing outcomes:

- **First**, writing should be taught as a skill and knowledge discipline that requires the use of specific strategies (such as *planning*, *writing*, *evaluating*, and *revising* written compositions) to accomplish a variety of ongoing school-related tasks—such as writing a report about a natural habitat, expressing an opinion about the right to privacy, or writing a poem or story about an experience with uncertainty. In these cases **writing is the medium through which students demonstrate their knowledge about a topic** and how well they can use writing to convey that knowledge.
- **Second**, writing should be seen and used as **a powerful method of helping students extend and deepen their knowledge** in any discipline from music to history to mathematics. In other words, writing should be used as a tool to develop knowledge, just as reading is such a tool. Not only does writing help students learn subject matter in any content discipline, it is also a highly effective way to help students learn to read with increasingly deep levels of comprehension (Graham & Perrin, 2007).

Current State of Writing

Despite the fact that writing proficiency is a necessary skill for success in public school (K–12), post-secondary education, and in work environments, the current state of writing quality among students and adults in the U.S., according to the National Commission on Writing (2003, 2004) and other organizations, is greatly in need of improvement. The consequences of poor writing can be measured in financial terms. For instance, private companies in the U.S. spend an estimated \$3.1 billion per year teaching their employees to write (National Commission on Writing, 2004). About 44% of college professors indicated that students are generally not prepared for the level of writing required for college-level work (Sanoff, 2006).

The latest **NAEP results** (2007) show that only 31% of 8th graders and 23% of 12th graders in U.S. public schools reached the *Proficient* achievement levels, which indicate solid academic performance. In 2002, the percentages were 30% and 22%, revealing almost no improvement over this 5-year period. Also, **writing disparities among groups of students historically underserved in public school settings are substantial**. Comparisons between English Learners (ELs) and non-ELs, for example, reveal large differences in writing performance. Only 58% of 8th grade ELs performed the *Basic* level of writing proficiency on the NAEP 2007 assessment compared to 89% of non-ELs. In 12th grade, only 40% of ELs could write at least at a *Basic* level compared to 82% of non-ELs (National Center on Educational Statistics [NCES], 2008).

In Oregon, similar outcomes have been observed. In 2009-2010, on the writing subtest of the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) in grades 4, 7, and 10 respectively, only 44%, 50% and 53% of students met grade-level goals or exceeded them (Oregon Department of Education, 2009). In other words, **about one of every two Oregon students performs below what the state defines as a minimum acceptable standard in writing.** This level of performance is no better than in previous years.

Different explanations are offered for the poor writing performance of students nationally and in Oregon. One possibility is that schools are not focusing enough on teaching students the skills they need to become successful writers. Strong support for this explanation is contained in a report by the National Writing Commission (2003) called *The Neglected “R.”*

“Although many models of effective ways to teach writing exist, both the teaching and practice of writing are increasingly shortchanged throughout the school and college years. Writing, always time-consuming for student and teacher, is today hard pressed in the American Classroom. Of the three “Rs,” writing is clearly the most neglected.” —*The Neglected “R”*

A related explanation is that **we underestimate how difficult it is to learn to write well and how difficult it is to teach.** The act of writing is inherently much more “internally” solitary than the act of reading (even if you explain what you understand as you read) or solving math problems. There is no clear stimulus to respond to, either correctly or incorrectly, as there is with a paragraph to read accurately or a math problem to solve. This internal aspect of writing makes it difficult for teachers to know how to help students who are struggling. And because written performance is so difficult, and time-intensive to measure (Cho, 2003; Olinghouse, 2009), (and no consensus yet on how best to measure it), even knowing who is doing well and who is struggling can be very difficult to determine reliably.

Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework—Writing

Despite these challenges, progress is being made on all fronts: on knowing what to teach for students to become effective writers and how to teach it, on knowing how to identify students who are struggling and what to do to support their improvement, and on knowing how to determine whether students have responded well or poorly to a school’s efforts to support their writing progress.

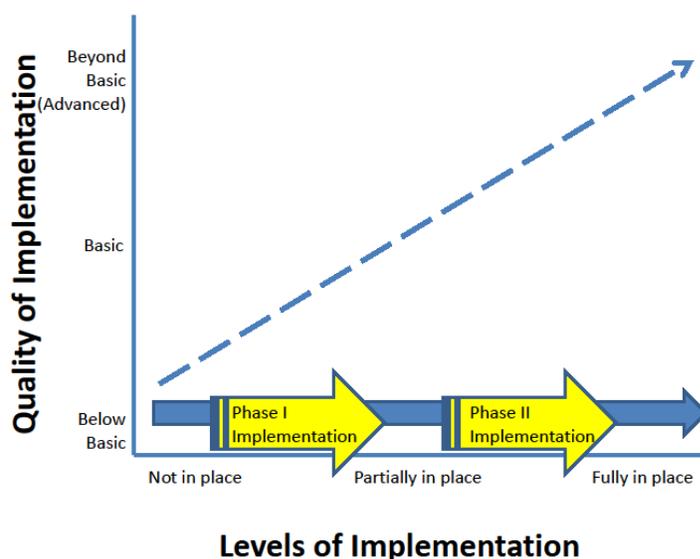
K-12 Writing, the third part of the Oregon Literacy Plan, and also a new section of the Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework, is not only research-based but is closely aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for Writing. As such, it provides a roadmap for districts and schools to ensure students meet or exceed the CCSS for Writing at each grade level and in each content area, experience success as writers each year in school, and graduate with an Oregon Diploma prepared as writers for college and career without need for writing remediation...because writing well matters.

(2) Implementation

The implementation components of *K-12 Writing*, also located in the *Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework—Writing*, are designed to put the literacy planning schools and districts do *into action*. Two tools—the [School Self Assessment](#) and the [School Implementation Guide](#)—are intended to help districts and schools begin planning and then to move gradually from planning to high-quality writing implementation.

The first step of implementation is for schools and districts to determine what is currently in place in schools with respect to goals, assessment, instruction, leadership, professional development, and commitment. To obtain this information, they conduct an internal audit using the School Self-assessment. Not only does this process lead to the next step of implementation but the process of engaging in the audit is highly beneficial on its own. It is unifying and instructive for teachers and administrators to work together to take inventory of the school's writing program (e.g., writing instruction, materials, assessments). The self assessment tool includes items related to (a) Goals, (b) Assessment, (c) Instruction, (d) Professional development, and (e) Leadership and Commitment. The audit team rates each item according to one of three levels of implementation: (a) not in place, (b) partially in place, or (c) fully in place. Generally, these are scored as "0," "1," or "2" and for some particularly important items the scores are doubled. Scores are summarized at the end of each component and a percentage of the total number of points is calculated.

In the next part of the process, a school and district prioritize a school's needs (based on summary scores and other considerations) and prepare for implementation. The Implementation Guide is then used to guide and improve implementation efforts. The idea is that as implementation improves, a school moves from not in place to partially in place (Phase I) and from partially in place to fully in place (Phase II). Consequently, it is necessary to engage in the audit process regularly (e.g., two times per year) to monitor implementation goals. Once a school reaches a level of full implementation, the school can continue to focus on improving implementation by addressing increasingly detailed aspects of implementation quality. For example, the school can focus on advanced quality features such as sustainability and the institutionalization of highly effective practices and procedures.



The Implementation Guide gives schools specific definitions of implementation goals. That is, schools compare their ratings of *not in place*, *partially in place*, or *fully in place* with item-specific information in the Implementation Guide. For example, a school can rate an item as partially in place and use the Implementation Guide to help determine next steps in implementation, identify information that might help focus their implementation efforts, and obtain resources (e.g., internet links and references) related to that particular area of implementation.

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