

INITIAL GUIDANCE

FOR THE LITERACY COMPONENT OF THE

REGULATIONS OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS FOR  
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION REGARDING  
PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS AND ENSURING LITERACY FOR  
STUDENTS ENTERING HIGH SCHOOL

Rhode Island Department of Education

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: THE LITERACY SECTION OF THE REGENTS' REGULATIONS

The Board of Regents recognizes the critical importance of literacy proficiency for all students. Section 4.0 of the Regents' High School Regulations requires that the literacy needs of all elementary, middle, and high school students be met so that all students graduating from high school leave attain a strong literacy foundation. These regulations call for a continuation of the direct and intense focus on literacy that is currently occurring in the early elementary grades. They focus on three main elements of literacy at the elementary and secondary level. They are:

- ◆ **Assessment** - Students are screened using state assessment data and/or a local screening process to identify which students are reading below grade level. Students who are identified as reading below grade level are diagnostically assessed to determine their actual reading level as well as their reading strengths and weaknesses.
- ◆ **Intervention** - Diagnostic assessment results are used to make a student-by-student decision to determine the additional reading instruction and intervention(s) that will be provided. The intervention component offers the widest range of targeted instructional supports and services as a child progresses from elementary to middle to high school.
- ◆ **Progress Monitoring** – A record is maintained of a student's literacy progress. It enables the school to determine the success of the intervention(s) to date and to determine a future course of action for each student.

A description of a *Scaffolded Framework for Secondary Literacy* follows. This framework depicts how schools and districts can create literacy programs and services consistent with the assessment, intervention, and progress-monitoring components of Regents' Regulations and the Personal Literacy Plans (PLP) Guidelines. This framework follows three broad tenets:

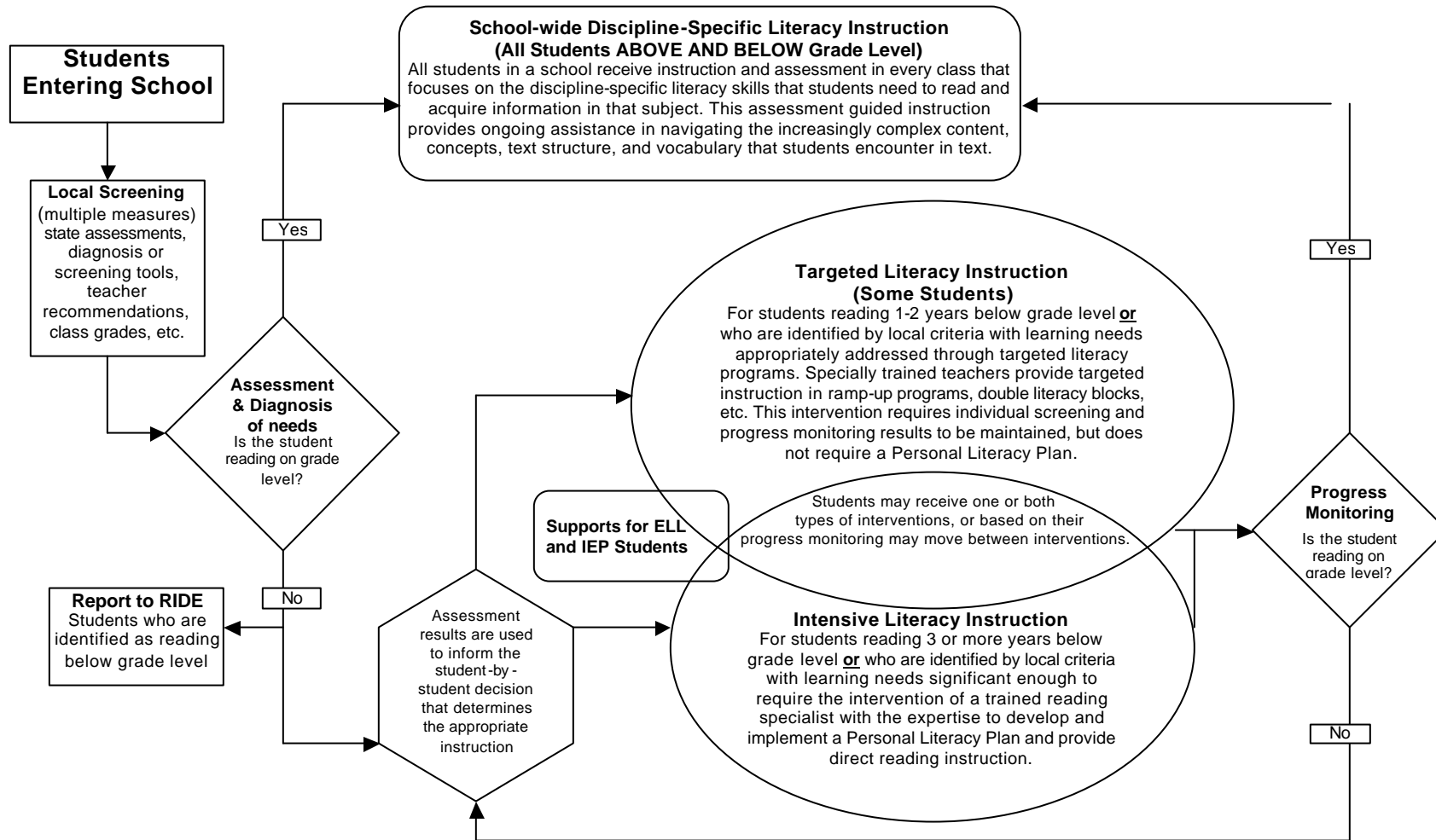
- ◆ **School-wide Discipline-Specific Literacy Instruction** – for all students. This instruction focuses on the discipline-specific literacy skills that all students need to read and acquire information in every subject. It provides ongoing assistance in navigating the increasingly complex content, concepts, text structure, and vocabulary students' encounter in text.
- ◆ **Targeted Literacy Instruction** – for some students. This instruction is provided using specially trained, but not necessarily reading-certified, teachers. It can entail strategy-based literacy "ramp-up" programs for reading and writing in the content areas, extended literacy periods, or purposefully designed study skills classes, among other approaches. A record of the screening, intervention, and progress monitoring results for the group(s) of students who receive Targeted Literacy Instruction must be maintained.
- ◆ **Intensive Literacy Instruction** – for fewer students. This instruction is for those students who have reading difficulties substantial enough to require intervention by a reading specialist with the expertise to develop and implement a *Personal Literacy Plan* (PLP) and provide direct reading instruction.

In summary, the regulations require that students be screened and diagnostically assessed to determine their literacy needs, appropriate instructional interventions be provided, and students with identified literacy needs continue to have their progress monitored and services provided until they attain grade-level proficiency. Additionally, these regulations also require that:

- ◆ teachers receive the substantial and ongoing professional development they need to meet effectively the literacy needs of students,
- ◆ school structures be created that support and promote the development of high levels of literacy from Pre-K through grade 12 and beyond, and
- ◆ the effectiveness of the literacy supports and services be evaluated every two years.

**Figure 1** provides a graphic representation of the process a district should follow to diagnose students, make a student-by-student decision to determine the appropriate intervention(s), provide the intervention(s), and monitor the students' progress until they attain grade-level proficiency.

**Figure 1 - Graphic Model of Scaffolded Literacy Supports at the Middle and Secondary Level**



**Notes:**

- This system is intended to provide districts with flexibility and local discretion when designing the system of supports and making decisions about the most appropriate interventions based on individual student needs. However, all students reading below grade level must receive literacy supports or services.
- The student-by-student decisions referenced in the hexagon above should be made in a manner consistent with the PLP *Expanding Circles of Support*.
- This framework should apply to all students in the entering MS and HS grades during the 2004-2005 school year with one grade being added each subsequent year.
- The intent is to maintain a K-12 focus on literacy so that the number of students with reading difficulties diminishes over time.

## **TOWARD THE TRANSFORMATION OF RI HIGH SCHOOLS**

*Better education depends on personalizing the high school experience for students, lending coherency to their education, organizing time differently, using technology at every opportune point, revitalizing the professional development of teachers and administrators, and enhancing leadership at every level at which it can affect teaching and learning (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1996, p. 5).*

### **Rhode Island's First High School Summit**

In November 2000, the Northeast Regional Lab at Brown University and the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) co-sponsored the first Rhode Island High School Summit. Intended to respond to a need for the improved performance of Rhode Island's high schools, the Summit was organized around five main goals:

- ◆ confirm what skills and knowledge students should possess upon graduation,
- ◆ develop new strategies to achieve results,
- ◆ identify the obstacles to achieving such results,
- ◆ identify steps for post-Summit activities, and
- ◆ propose recommendations to the Regents concerning Rhode Island high schools.

About one hundred people from key stakeholder groups attended the first summit. Before the Summit feedback and ideas were solicited from broad constituency groups comprising over 400 individuals. Summit attendees included union representatives, teachers, superintendents, students, special education directors, school committee members, principals, members of school improvement teams, curriculum directors, and representatives of Rhode Island businesses and industries. The Summit's focus groups identified eight broad areas in which high school transformation was needed:

- ◆ students should arrive at school ready to learn,
- ◆ they must learn what matters,
- ◆ literacy must become a priority,
- ◆ schools should be adolescent-friendly yet challenging,
- ◆ cohorts of leaders must be developed,
- ◆ schools must teach for tomorrow, not merely today and yesterday,
- ◆ students must see learning as the "business of life," and
- ◆ communities must support high schools and their students.

### **The Second High School Summit**

Although much had been accomplished as a result of the first Summit, there was a need for further evaluation and recommendations. A second High School Summit convened on March 8, 2002, with the co-sponsorship of RIDE, RI Office of Higher Education, RI Department of Labor and Training, and the State School-to-Career Office. It was organized around the priorities that emerged from the Regents' subcommittee—literacy, graduation requirements, and personalization. The second summit continued to use a focus group design, and concentrated on the changes that needed to be made in high schools and their sending schools in order to help all students achieve at high levels. It also focused on the specific steps the Regents should take following the Summit.

### ***Summit Background Summary***

The second Summit provided valuable information about the current state of high schools in Rhode Island. It served as both a progress report on the outcomes of the first Summit, and a forum for additional ideas about improving the state's high schools. Participants saw Rhode Island schools as being in a state of flux. They perceived a lack of student commitment and ownership

and a lack of parent and community involvement, complicated by a similar lack of commitment by schools to all students, bureaucratic mandates, and closed-door policies. However, they also saw schools as entering a period of growth, with many sparks of success. Summit attendees stressed that by working together and establishing common beliefs we can create systems of smaller learner communities in which teachers are involved with students' lives.

### **Board of Regents' Regulations Regarding High Schools**

Following this Summit, the Board of Regents High School Subcommittee met and developed draft regulations for the elementary, middle, and secondary schools. These regulations were designed to make the Regents' priorities an integral part of our state's public schools. Draft regulations that emphasized these priorities—literacy, graduation requirements, and restructuring / personalization—were approved by the Regents in June 2002.

These draft regulations were widely disseminated and discussed throughout the summer and fall of 2002 at three public hearings, four regional meetings, and numerous meetings with superintendents, principals, school committees, and other interested parties. Throughout this period of public engagement, the Subcommittee of the Regents met to revise these draft regulations based on the feedback they received. Following this intensive dialogue, public hearings, and revision, the RI Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education approved ***Regulations Regarding Public High Schools and Ensuring Literacy for All Students Entering High School*** (Appendix A) on January 9, 2003. These final regulations, Version 1-12, are designed to:

- ◆ provide an organizational structure for redesigning elementary, middle, and secondary schools to help all students achieve at high levels;
- ◆ provide schools, districts, and the state with a concrete plan of action focused on literacy;
- ◆ establish more student-centered, performance-based, personalized learning communities that ensure students are known well and taught and assessed using multiple measures;
- ◆ approach changes systemically, focusing K-12, in a way that ensures students are provided with the requisite foundation prior to entering high school; and
- ◆ create secondary schools designed to meet the needs of the students currently enrolled and those that will be entering with the benefit of this comprehensive K-12 focus on their learning.

In order to accomplish these goals, high schools will need to focus on literacy, provide ongoing professional development, shift to a comprehensive school counseling model, establish clear proficiency-based graduation expectations, revisit the departmental structure, pilot new programs, establish a continuum of supports, and assess their effectiveness. The successful completion of such goals, and improving personalization at the high school level, will require each school to incorporate specific strategies into a school improvement plan. These strategies should include, but not limited to, academies, smaller communities, literacy, advising programs, learning plans, and teaming.

# Literacy Guidance

## **PURPOSE OF THIS INITIAL ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY LITERACY GUIDANCE**

Two separate policy initiatives guide this focus on literacy. The first is found in the Rhode Island (RI) General Assembly's commitment to improving students' reading achievement as seen in the 1987 General law 16-67-2 (3)(i-iii) and the amended 2002 RI General Law 16-1-7 (a-c). These laws require schools to provide supplementary literacy instruction for educationally disadvantaged students in grades K-12 and to develop personal literacy plans for all students K-3 who are at risk for reading failure. The second policy initiative is found in the RI Board of Regents High School Regulations, which call for an intense and explicit focus on literacy in upper elementary, middle, and high schools.

This initial guidance document is designed to assist schools and districts in meeting the *Regulations of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education Regarding Public High Schools and Ensuring Literacy for All Students Entering High School*. It provides additional information about how to implement effectively the components of a Scaffolded Literacy Framework that results in a seamless K-12 focus on literacy.

These literacy supports outlined in this guidance are intended be phased in over the next few years. For the 2004-2005 school year all in-district and transferring students in grade 5 as well as the entering middle school and high school grades (usually grades 6 and 9) must be provided literacy instruction and supports in accordance with the Regents' regulations. An additional grade will be added at each level each year (for example in 2005-2006 grades 5, 6, 7 and 9, 10) until all students who require additional literacy supports K-12 receive them. Additionally, schools are encouraged to screen students transferring into the school, in any grade, and provide literacy supports if the student is reading below grade level. The expectation is that the number of students requiring these supports will diminish over time as the specialized literacy services enable additional students to engage in grade-appropriate reading.

It is important to note that two critical pieces of information, in addition to the Regents' regulations, have been utilized in formulating this initial guidance. The first source is the self-assessment information, which districts submitted to RIDE in June 2003. The second source is the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) guidance for assisting schools in meeting the NEASC 2005 standards for accreditation. The NEASC guidance for accreditation is used as a complement to the current regulations for high schools.

The sub-headings found in this initial literacy guidance are aligned with the Regents' High School Regulations. This initial guidance will be followed by additional supporting guidance that provides technical assistance and images of successful practices. It will include suggested print and electronic resources and list potential partners to support efforts to meet student needs in a manner consistent with these regulations.

## 4.1 Assessing Reading Levels of Students Before and During High School

*Each school district in RI, pursuant to goals of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2002 ("No Child Left Behind Act"), shall report to RIDE on an annual basis, at a time and in a manner set by the Commissioner, the reading levels of all of its students who fail to attain proficiency on Commissioner-designated subtests of state assessments. Such reporting will build on the requirements of Article 18 which compel schools and districts to report the reading level of all students in Grades K-3. Beginning in September, 2004, districts will annually identify all students in grades 5, 9, and 11 who did not attain proficiency the previous Spring in English Language Arts. Districts will diagnostically assess each of these students and report their reading levels to RIDE by December each year. These reading levels shall be determined by administering one or more diagnostic assessment instruments or processes pre-approved by RIDE. This requirement applies to all public schools at every grade level and is not limited to high schools. This regulation is enacted in order to ensure that reading interventions are undertaken when there is evidence of a literacy problem. The district shall be responsible for costs associated with test procurement, administration, and interpretation. The Commissioner may authorize the use of suitable state or federal funds for such purposes. Based on the results of reading assessments, at all levels, the Commissioner may exercise his authorities under Title 16 to intervene in a school or district to ensure that students, at all grade levels, are having their literacy needs, as indicated by these assessments, effectively addressed.*

### **Clarification of the Intent and Terms of Regulation 4.1**

For the purposes of this regulation, literacy is defined as reading. The intent of this section of the regulations is to identify those students who will require additional supports in reading and to ensure that they receive appropriate instruction and supports to be able to read at grade level. The New Standards Reference Examination (NSRE) administered in grades 4, 8, and 11 offers an existing state-wide assessment that schools and districts can use in conjunction with their local screening process for determining the literacy needs of students. Students who do not meet or exceed the standards on the **Reading: Basic Understanding** subtest will need a diagnostic assessment tool or process to confirm the student's reading needs and to plan the most appropriate supports. This NSRE *subtest* was selected because it could capture those students who have fundamental reading difficulties. The selection of this subtest is not intended to signal a diminished emphasis on analysis and interpretation. The reading skills needed for reading analysis and interpretation remain a part of RI's state assessment system and they are also essential skills to develop for life-long learning. Consequently, both of these facets of reading proficiency will require additional and ongoing K-12 emphasis in curricula, instruction, and assessment to ensure that all students are proficient readers.

### **Assessment - Diagnosing and Screening**

The NSRE administered in grades 4, 8, and 11 is intended to serve as a screening tool, which would then be followed by a diagnostic assessment or process to identify students who are not reading on grade level. Many schools receive the results on the state assessment after determining a student's placement and course offerings for the next academic year. Accordingly, schools and districts may choose to use a local screening process, with clear criteria, to identify which students are reading below grade level. These criteria should include local assessments (classroom, school, or district), student portfolios, student grades, and teacher recommendation, among others.

This diagnostic assessment or process should also identify which components of comprehensive reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, text comprehension and/or writing) are problematic for the student. The results of this diagnosis will be used to plan the type and expected duration of the **Targeted** and/or **Intensive Literacy Instruction** that the student

will receive. These screening and diagnosis processes for identifying student literacy needs are consistent with the individual screening requirements of the Personal Literacy Plan guidelines.

As students progress through grades K-12, the process of diagnosing individual students and implementing interventions at the middle and high school level must be adapted to meet the needs of adolescent learners. However, the overarching intent remains consistent—that schools must support each student’s needs so that they can engage in grade appropriate reading. In the elementary grades, the classroom teacher or other trained teacher professional should administer this diagnostic assessment. At the middle and high school, reading specialists, specially trained classroom teachers providing **Targeted Literacy Instruction**, and/or other trained teachers should administer these diagnostic assessments, provide interventions, and monitor student progress.

### **Using the Results of Diagnosing and Screening**

The diagnosis of reading difficulties is an essential step that should indicate a student’s reading strengths and weaknesses. Schools need to analyze these results and other relevant student data in a manner consistent with the PLP *Guidelines: Expanding Circles of Support*. This analysis should guide the student-by-student decisions that ensure that appropriate instructional interventions are designed and/or selected to address identified student learning needs. The reading level of each student who is assessed and identified as reading below grade level shall be determined, recorded, and stored. **Figure 2** offers a sample **Student Literacy Report** for maintaining the diagnosis and screening results.

Building on the requirements of Article 18, the regulations require that each school district submit an annual report to RIDE with the number of students who did not meet proficiency on the Statewide ELA assessment that is in place at the time of the annual report. For example, the appropriate Grade Level Expectations representing literal understanding—when they become operational in 2005. This report should also include the number, not names of students, whose reading levels were identified as below grade level on the second diagnostic assessment. Costs of administering the diagnostics are the responsibility of the district. **Figure 3** offers a sample **District Report Form** for organizing and submitting the reading levels of students. This sample form was taken directly from the sample reporting forms found in the Personal Literacy Plans (PLP) Guidelines. The PLP guidelines provide specific guidance about screening and assessing students’ literacy proficiency as well as a list of suggested diagnostic assessments that are consistent with the intent of this component of the regulations. District and school personnel were forwarded a copy of the PLP in October 2003, and it is also available on the RIDE Web site.

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## 4.2 Improving Literacy for Students Below Grade Level in Reading

*By June, 2003, districts must complete an interim self-assessment that describes the mechanisms in place: 1) to identify and support students below proficiency in literacy, 2) to ensure that elementary and middle schools and middle and high schools work collaboratively to identify those students who are below grade level prior to entering a new school, and 3) to support the implementation of necessary programming at the middle and secondary level to address the student needs identified in 4.1. By May, 2004, school improvement plans and district strategic plans will include specific information about the methods and means by which students who are reading below grade level will attain at least grade-level abilities. This requirement shall apply throughout the K-12 system. Any student who continues to fall below grade level in reading and/or fails to attain proficiency in subsequent years on the state assessments designated by the Commissioner shall continue to receive specialized assistance until they attain the requisite proficiency. By September, 2004, each middle and high school shall have specific programs in place to provide support to middle and secondary school students below proficiency in literacy, to ensure articulation between schools, and to support the implementation of necessary programming. Beginning in May, 2006, and every two years thereafter, each district shall evaluate, based on student performance, the effectiveness of their literacy program. Districts shall forward this information to RIDE as part of an annual submission of their strategic plans.*

### **Clarification of the Intent and Terms of Regulation 4.2**

Recognizing the important role that literacy plays in life and work, the Regents wanted to ensure that all students leaving high school had attained the requisite literacy, numeracy, affective, and higher order thinking skills they will need to pursue a post-secondary education and enter the world of work in a self-selected career. RI's SALT Survey and state assessment data indicate that the implementation of research-based literacy practices and student achievement diminishes substantially between grades 4 and 10. Additionally, the infrastructure and literacy expertise in our state's middle and high schools are limited. This impedes secondary school abilities to attend to students' literacy needs.

At present, each district addresses literacy in multiple ways. Traditionally, adolescent literacy instruction has received less attention and focus than literacy in the elementary grades. The Regents' regulations were purposefully crafted to foster a K-12 focus on literacy that places an intense and explicit focus on literacy in upper elementary, middle, and high school grades. The intent of the regulations is to:

- ◆ build on the strong reading foundation provided in grades K-4,
- ◆ ensure that students entering high school arrive with the requisite literacy skills to meet the demands of secondary school classrooms,
- ◆ guarantee that each student identified as below grade level receives the appropriate literacy interventions to meet the demands of secondary school classrooms,
- ◆ create a system of progress monitoring and services that continues until students attain grade level proficiency, and
- ◆ use the results of the diagnostic assessments outlined in section 4.1, which include a students' strengths and learning needs, as the basis for designing / selecting the appropriate instructional intervention(s) for students.

### **A Scaffolded Framework for Secondary Literacy**

As outlined in the PLP guidelines, most students need explicit instruction in reading comprehension. Key comprehension strategies, such as summarization, questioning, making connections—employed before, during, and after reading—need to be taught to students in the context of their reading. It is of utmost importance for students to learn not only what the strategy is and why it is important, but additionally how, when, and where to apply it. State assessment data and recent research suggests students will need three types of literacy services to scaffold their

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literacy development. One is a school-wide, discipline-specific approach needed to build on and further develop the literacy gains made at the elementary level. The other two are targeted approaches to close existing gaps in student performance. Providing these three types of support will make it possible for schools to address the literacy needs of all students. ***This Scaffolded Framework for Secondary Literacy should be flexible and allow students to move among the different facets of this framework—based on the results of the progress monitoring students receive.*** The three main tenets of this *framework* are:

- ◆ **School-wide Discipline-Specific Literacy Instruction – for all students.** This instruction will focus on the discipline-specific literacy skills that all students need to read and acquire information in every subject. It should provide ongoing assistance in navigating the increasingly complex content, concepts, text structure, and vocabulary they encounter in text.
- ◆ **Targeted Literacy Instruction – for some students.** This instruction is provided using specially trained, but not necessarily reading-certified, teachers. It could entail strategy-based literacy “ramp up” programs for reading and writing in the content areas, extended literacy periods, or purposefully designed study skills classes, among other approaches. A record of the screening, intervention, and progress monitoring results for the group(s) of students who receive *Targeted Literacy Instruction* needs to be maintained.
- ◆ **Intensive Literacy Instruction – for fewer students.** This instruction is for those students who have reading difficulties substantial enough to require intervention by a reading specialist with the expertise to develop and implement a *Personal Literacy Plan* and provide direct reading instruction.

This scaffolded approach should provide the framework in which instruction and learning experiences are crafted for students. The content inherent in the various disciplines—science, mathematics, language arts, social sciences, fine arts, etc.—will serve as the vehicle for developing the literacy—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—of the students in that content area. At the broadest level, the literacy experiences of students should have several main themes:

- ◆ Incorporating reading strategies consistent with the research on adolescent literacy;
- ◆ Pre-reading experiences that include use framing questions, graphic organizers, and other tools to activate prior knowledge and create a purpose for their reading;
- ◆ During reading activities that support students’ acquisition and understanding of desired course content and the structure used in narrative and expository text; and
- ◆ Post reading activities that include structured opportunities and guided inquiries designed to foster evidence-based classroom talking and writing.

At present, very little infrastructure, expertise, personnel, and resources exist to attend to students’ literacy needs at the middle and secondary level. Schools and districts must consider the budgetary implications associated with securing personnel with the requisite expertise to deliver the comprehensive approach to secondary literacy required in the Regents’ Regulations. Delivering these services will require secondary literacy personnel and resources to be used in a variety of ways including, but not limited to, working with a set number of students to:

- ◆ Assess students’ literacy proficiency
- ◆ Implement direct instructional supports to students
- ◆ Monitor students’ progress

Additionally, these secondary literacy personnel or reading specialists should also spend a large portion of their time (preferably 50% or more) working with teachers to build school-wide literacy capacity by:

- ◆ Providing direct in-class modeling, coaching, and supports to content area teachers
- ◆ Providing professional development on research-based literacy practices that content area teachers can incorporate into their classrooms

This dual focus of the literacy specialists on students and teachers, as outlined above, is intended to cultivate a school-wide focus on literacy instruction. This will expand the capacity of our secondary schools by ensuring that the appropriate resources and literacy personnel are available to provide direct in-class instructional support to students **and** teachers. Taking a long-term view, as students progress through the educational system with the increased focus on literacy in all elementary and middle grades, the number of students arriving in high schools not reading on grade level will probably decrease substantially. Similarly, this should enable secondary schools to use the literacy infrastructure that is built over the next four years to address more effectively the learning needs of those students who, after these additional literacy supports are implemented, still require additional supports. At present, few teachers at the secondary level have had sufficient training and experiences in teaching reading. Developing the literacy of all students will require substantial amounts of on-going job-embedded professional development for classroom teachers. It will also require changes in curricula, instruction, assessment, and school structures. This professional development and other supporting structures are essential for implementing a high-quality *Scaffolded Framework for Secondary Literacy* that attends to students' literacy needs in every classroom.

### ***School-wide Discipline-Specific Literacy Instruction***

The first type of literacy instruction should address the literacy needs of all students in all classes using discipline-specific reading strategies. Students need to continue to learn and acquire vocabulary and expand their repertoire of literacy strategies as they experience new and more sophisticated text. They require ongoing assistance in navigating the increasingly complex content, concepts, text structure, and vocabulary they encounter in text. Research has shown that focusing on basic comprehension or reading strategies in the absence of domain-specific knowledge is an ineffective approach to reading instruction and remediation. Students must concurrently develop their knowledge of domain-specific content and their literacy skills. This discipline-specific approach to literacy instruction and help for students trying to navigate informational text is limited in the upper elementary grades and beyond.

The content, concepts, and big ideas associated with the study of each discipline should serve as the vehicles to develop student interest and engage them in structured learning experiences purposefully designed to develop their literacy proficiency. The emphasis should be on creating learning experiences that develop a deep grasp of the desired course content, while attending to the literacy strategies and techniques needed for success in the respective discipline. Correspondingly, this school-wide literacy instruction needs to provide a concurrent focus on content and comprehension strategies specific to each discipline. This dual focus will enable students in mathematics, science, social studies, and the applied arts, among other subjects, to make sense of the content and concepts found in the texts that they read.

Often the real difference between good readers and struggling readers is domain-specific background knowledge and knowledge of literacy practices. Students who have the ability to read words fluently or who are capable readers in one discipline or genre can struggle in another subject. This is often because they don't have a working knowledge of the text structure, vocabulary, or the underlying concepts and big ideas of the discipline.

Accordingly, it takes someone who knows mathematics well to effectively help someone build meaning and understanding of the content contained in a mathematics text. It takes someone who knows science well to effectively help someone build meaning and understanding of the content contained in a science text. Clearly, there will still be a role and need for remediation, as some students will need that additional support. However, the ***primary responsibility*** for maintaining and expanding the literacy gains students make in the elementary grades lies with the classroom teacher—the content-area specialist.

Classroom teachers are uniquely suited to teach a child to read, write, speak, and listen as a mathematician, a scientist, an artist, et. al. By placing an emphasis on comprehension strategies and the use of graphic organizers well aligned with their respective disciplines, they can help

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students become literate in their discipline. Consequently, it is expected that all teachers will provide instruction that supports the development of literacy skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—specific to their discipline. The instruction should include, but not be limited to, literacy experiences that use a variety of comprehension strategies and graphic organizers to help students access, analyze, and build meaning of the information and ideas in the text they read.

### ***Targeted Literacy Instruction***

The second type of literacy instruction should address the literacy needs of those students who are diagnosed as reading below grade level and require additional, but not intensive, literacy support. This *Targeted Literacy Instruction* could be delivered through strategy-based literacy “ramp up” programs for reading and writing in the content areas, extended literacy periods, or purposefully designed study skills classes, among other strategies. This *Targeted Literacy Instruction* will require many different strategies, probably take many forms, and should be specifically designed to meet the diverse needs of the students.

At the middle and high school level, this placement decision should be made by specially trained personnel in a manner that is consistent with the “Expanding Circle of Student Support” in the PLP Guidelines. *Targeted literacy instruction* will usually be provided for those students: 1) who are identified as reading one or two years below grade level, or 2) who through the application of local criteria are identified as having learning needs that can be addressed through one of the targeted literacy “programs” the school has implemented to meet student needs. See *Suggested Criteria for Determining the Appropriate Literacy Services and Supports* in **appendix A** for more information.

This *Targeted Literacy Instruction* is in addition to the school-wide literacy instruction that students will receive. It occurs in separate blocks of time that might include an extended English Language Arts period, a “ramp-up” course, or an after school, Saturday, or summer program. Students may participate in one or more of these components of a scaffolded middle/high school literacy program. Although this *Targeted Literacy Instruction* might occur in a class of students, the direct instructional supports should occur in the context of small groups of students. These small groups should be carefully created by the teacher, based on an assessment of reading level and proficiency with various strategies. Ongoing assessments must be used to purposefully inform instructional interventions and scaffold student learning. Students who are less proficient would meet most often with the teacher. Finally, these groups need to be flexible, dynamic, and re-formed as students progress and develop. The predominant instructional approach should be for teachers to work with small groups of students to close the gaps in performance identified through the diagnostic assessments and ongoing progress monitoring.

These targeted literacy programs must provide supports for all students in a school’s population, including special needs, Limited English Proficiency, and regular education students who are identified as below grade level in reading. Schools that have existing programs in place may have to revise them to align with the tenets of this framework. Schools that do not have a “ramp up” course, study skills, or other instructional program to provide *Targeted Literacy Instructional* supports to identified students, will need to consider these programming needs for implementation in September 2004. Teachers assigned to these classes should receive substantial and ongoing professional development as well as the instructional materials and supports necessary to make available to students the *Targeted Literacy Instruction* the class / service is designed to provide.

The learning opportunities that students experience should be drawn from a comprehensive literacy framework for reading instruction that includes interactive read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading. Emphasis should be placed on the direct instruction and guided inquiry of specific reading strategies students can use to extract pertinent information from text. The instructional framework guiding this *Targeted Literacy Instruction* should include, but not be limited to, literacy experiences that use a variety of comprehension strategies and graphic organizers to help students:

- ◆ compare and contrast themes and ideas
- ◆ summarize and retell stories
- ◆ use a variety of techniques to unlock words
- ◆ learn vocabulary in context
- ◆ identify important and relevant content in narrative and expository text
- ◆ use the structure of text to build meaning and understanding
- ◆ evaluate the author's craft and literary merit
- ◆ craft poetry, responses to literature, functional, informational, and persuasive writing
- ◆ create story webs and complete graphic organizers
- ◆ read and listen to poetry, biographies, and narrative, functional, expository, and other texts

### ***Intensive Literacy Instruction***

The third type of literacy instruction is for those students who have substantial difficulties with reading. For these students, Personal Literacy Plans should be developed by reading specialists and should contain provisions for direct reading instruction. Accordingly, at the middle and secondary level, PLPs that document and plan the *current instructional supports, intervention strategies, length and frequency of sessions, materials, procedures, and desired outcomes* should be developed for struggling readers. Students requiring a PLP require more intensive support than can be provided in the *Targeted Literacy Instruction* framework.

*Intensive Literacy Instruction* should usually be provided for those students: 1) who are identified as reading three or more years below grade level, or 2) who through the application of local criteria are identified as having reading difficulties substantial enough to require intervention by a reading specialist with the expertise to develop and implement a *Personal Literacy Plan*. See *Suggested Criteria for Determining the Appropriate Literacy Services and Supports* in **appendix A** for more information.

For these students, at the middle and secondary level, reading specialists would assume primary responsibility for the design and implementation of the PLP—including diagnosis, intervention, and progress monitoring (see PLP Guidelines for more detail). Students who receive *Intensive Literacy Instruction* might also, based on their identified needs, receive *Targeted Literacy Instruction*. The content, processes, strategies, and techniques needed to attain grade-level proficiency will vary among these students who will be in different stages of literacy development:

- ◆ Emergent - beginning to read signs and labels
- ◆ Early Reading - using letter sounds to read words
- ◆ Transitional - beginning to read easy chapter books
- ◆ Reading to Learn - reading texts to gain information
- ◆ Advanced - reading varied texts for many purposes

*Note: Students identified as needing Intensive Literacy Instruction will also receive school-wide discipline-specific literacy instruction and may also receive Targeted Literacy Instruction.*

### **4.3 Literacy Programming for Students Reading Below Grade Level**

*All Rhode Island schools shall provide literacy instruction and support to students who are assessed as having reading levels below grade level consistent with the requirements outlined in section 4.1 of these regulations. The purpose of this literacy instruction and support is to ensure that all high school students attain grade level literacy ability. Rhode Island high schools, shall have specific programs in place to provide such programming to all entering ninth graders who are assessed as having reading levels below grade level.*

#### **Clarification of the Intent and Terms of Regulation 4.3**

These regulations and the amended 2002 RI General Law 16.1-7 (a-c) requiring schools to develop personal literacy “programs” for all students K-3 who are at risk for reading failure are designed to ensure that students reading below grade level receive appropriate literacy instruction and support. It is very important for readers to note that the word “program” as used here refers to a design to improve a student’s reading level, not a basal reading series or other commercial reading program. The intent is for schools and districts to provide instructional literacy services and support for all students.

#### **Key Items to Consider When Developing a Scaffolded Instructional Framework for Secondary Literacy**

Below are some key ideas to think about as you begin to exam your current literacy services and instructional supports for students. These suggested considerations are intended to assist in devising a Scaffolded Literacy Framework that is of sufficient depth and complexity to comprehensively develop each student’s reading proficiency. Consequently, when devising and/or revising literacy programs at the middle and high school level it is important to ensure that:

- ◆ Student placement is based on a diagnostic assessment or process
- ◆ The progress of students is monitored to determine future instruction and placement
- ◆ Comprehension is the primary focus with an emphasis on research-based comprehension strategies and metacognition
- ◆ Expert teachers, in all curricula areas, model and provide explicit instruction in reading and comprehension strategies and the use of graphic organizers
- ◆ Instruction builds both the skill and desire to read increasingly complex materials and includes vocabulary development and understanding text structures
- ◆ Consistent and clear expectations for classroom routines exist
- ◆ Formative classroom assessments of students’ literacy strengths and needs are used to purposefully group students with comparable learning needs and guide instruction
- ◆ Emphasis is placed on reading and writing along with the integration of oral communication development
- ◆ High-quality on-going professional development is provided and viewed as important
- ◆ School leadership and organizational structures support and promote the development of high levels of literacy
- ◆ A process for program review and evaluation exists
- ◆ Reading specialists are available to provide intensive instruction to students in need

#### **Comprehensive Literacy - Essential Components of Reading Instruction**

When designing instructional supports for students, the following components of effective reading instruction should be considered:

- ◆ Oral Language - the foundation of all literacy development. Without language there would be no reading. Reading is very much a language activity and, ultimately, our ability to read is impacted by our language skills.

- ◆ Phonemic Awareness - the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds in words on an oral basis.
- ◆ Phonics - the relationship between the letters of written language and the individual sounds of spoken language.
- ◆ Fluency - the ability to read a text accurately and quickly, with smoothness and expression. Fluency is the bridge between word recognition and comprehension.
- ◆ Vocabulary Development - the development of stored information about meaning and pronunciation of words necessary for communication.
- ◆ Comprehension - the understanding of text read.
- ◆ Writing (encoding) - the mutual process of reading (decoding); a product of comprehension.

The ultimate goal of reading proficiency is the understanding of what is read, i.e. comprehension. Proficient readers expect to understand the author's message when they read. Researchers have examined what proficient readers do to achieve this outcome. Their findings show that the process of comprehension is an active and strategic process. Readers make decisions by selecting strategies that fit the kind of text they are reading and their purpose for reading. Most students need explicit instruction in reading comprehension. Key comprehension strategies, such as summarization, questioning, making connections—employed before, during, and after reading—need to be taught to students in the context of their reading. It is of utmost importance for students not only to learn what the strategy is and why it is important, but additionally how, when, and where to apply it.

Students' knowledge of text organization also plays a key role in reading comprehension. Content-area textbooks, which account for most of the teaching and learning of subject matter, pose special problems because they are more complex than narrative materials. In the early stages of reading, students read about familiar topics. As they move up through the grades, they begin to cope with acquiring new information and a more advanced vocabulary (science, mathematics, literature). Therefore, they need more advanced comprehension strategies in order to construct their own understanding of key concepts. Generally, secondary texts contain a high proportion of difficult concepts and technical vocabulary. As a result, the readability of the text is often higher than the grade in which students are using it. In the upper grades, as many as 50 percent of students may have difficulty with their textbooks (Singer and Donlan, 1989). PLPs need to address expository reading at the higher grade levels so that students at risk can access the content information and develop the vocabulary necessary to grasp new concepts.

"Vocabulary Knowledge is the most important predictor of reading comprehension." (Gunning, 2003). Vocabulary development needs to be understood as far more than looking up words in a dictionary and using the words in a sentence. It is a complex process that involves many factors, including students' prior knowledge, their skill in using context, their knowledge of how English language works, and their general cognitive ability. Developing vocabulary is not a matter of listing words and definitions to memorize and then testing them. The majority of word meanings are learned through everyday experiences with oral and written language. "Increasing the volume of students' reading is the single most important thing teachers can do to promote large-scale vocabulary growth." (Nagy, 1988) Vocabulary knowledge is also fundamental to reading comprehension; we cannot understand text without knowing what most of the words mean.

In order to design appropriate *Targeted Literacy Instruction* (not requiring a PLP) and *Intensive Literacy Instruction* (requiring a PLP) that results in improved student reading proficiency, teachers need to be well versed in the reading process, the various components of a good reading program, and the strategies appropriate for teaching the components at various levels. With these understandings, the trained personnel diagnosing student literacy needs can design appropriate intervention strategies that respond to the student's particular reading issues.

## **Planning, Budgetary Implications, and RIDE Supports**

### **School Improvement Planning and School Articulation**

By May 2004, district strategic plans and school improvement plans must “include specific information about the methods and means by which students who are reading below grade level will attain at least grade-level abilities.” The PLP Guidelines define grade level as the “reading level is the same as student’s grade in school” and below grade level as the “student’s reading level is lower than his/her grade in school”. The Regents’ regulations require that students be provided with “specialized assistance” until they attain grade-level proficiency. Schools are expected to have programs and instructional supports in place by September 2004 for these students. Districts are also expected to ensure articulation between school levels and to support the implementation of this Scaffolded Framework for Secondary Literacy.

### **Potential Budget Implications**

Schools and districts are responsible for the costs associated with these diagnostic assessments. Student performance on state assessments from Spring 2003 may provide some useful guidelines at the outset of the 2004-2005 budgetary cycle. The number of students who *nearly achieved the standard*, who were *below standard*, or who showed *little evidence of achievement* might be a useful gauge to ascertain, roughly, the number of students who will need a secondary diagnostic assessment. Correspondingly, the number of students in the school in the *nearly achieved the standard* and *below standard* categories might also prove useful for estimating the number of students who might require *Targeted Literacy Instruction* and more *Intensive Literacy Instruction* and supports. Schools without personnel at the middle and high school level with expertise in secondary literacy should incorporate this into their budgetary planning. Some items that districts have identified as important to consider when budgeting for secondary literacy are:

- ◆ The professional development needed to foster school-wide literacy services
- ◆ Staffing to provide *Targeted Literacy Instruction* in additional or extended periods of time
- ◆ The professional development for the teachers providing the *Targeted Literacy Instruction*
- ◆ Instructional materials needed to support this increased focus on literacy
- ◆ Specially trained reading personnel to implement the PLPs for those students requiring *Intensive Literacy Instruction*
- ◆ Diagnostic assessments to determine students’ literacy needs
- ◆ Reading specialists and/or literacy coaches needed to provide direct in-class modeling, coaching, and supports to content-area teachers

### **Supports RIDE is Currently Providing or Creating**

RIDE will be issuing more specific guidance on the literacy component of the Regent’s Regulations—including specific examples of how schools and districts can create literacy programs and services consistent with the intent of the High School Regulations and the assessment, intervention, and progress monitoring components of Personal Literacy Plans (PLP) Guidelines. Schools and their communities should investigate various processes and instructional frameworks that have proven effective in dramatically improving the reading, writing, listening, and speaking abilities of students. Reading specialists within districts should be consulted about a range of services and processes that can be utilized more widely by all teachers.

Changing student performance means changing teacher practices and supports in all subjects. To assist in these efforts, RIDE will support local and regional workshops via state-wide networks, focused on research-based literacy practices. Correspondingly, RIDE will design,

provide, and/or broker professional development and support to administrators, instructional leaders, teachers, and staff on effective school-wide literacy practices that can enhance all students' reading. The networks will:

- ◆ Provide professional development that teachers need to effectively teach and assess the discipline-specific literacy skills that can be applied to the 15 hours of professional development teachers need annually in the priority areas of literacy, graduation by proficiency, or personalization;
- ◆ Create training materials that can be used at the network level and by local districts and schools to provide research-based, job-embedded professional development focused on adolescent literacy;
- ◆ Work in conjunction with districts to establish school structures that support the deep implementation of reading practices;
- ◆ Develop protocols that schools and districts can use to evaluate how well the learning, teaching, and school structures are working to ensure that all students are achieving high levels of literacy; and
- ◆ Support districts in their efforts to create and sustain the capacity needed to continue developing students' literacy proficiency, thereby reducing future literacy difficulties.

**Figure 2**  
**Student Literacy Report for Diagnosis and Screening Results**  
**(Adapted from PLP Student Report Form)**

**Student:** \_\_\_\_\_

Year	Grade	School/District	Reading Level		PLP Y/N	Intervention			Teacher Notes
			Beginning of year	End of year		School- wide	Targeted	Intensive	
20__	K								
20__	1								
20__	2								
20__	3								
20__	4								
20__	5								
20__	6								
20__	7								
20__	8								
20__	9								
20__	10								
20__	11								
20__	12								
20__									

**Figure 3**  
**Sample District Reporting Form for Student Reading Levels**  
**(Adapted from PLP District Report Form)**

DISTRICT: \_\_\_\_\_

SUPERINTENDENT: \_\_\_\_\_

District Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade Level	# of Students Reading At or Above Grade Level	# of Students Reading Below Grade Level	# of Students with PLPs	Special Populations with PLPs		Total Student Enrollment at Grade Level
				ESL	IEP	
K						
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						



## Appendix A

### Clarifying the Relationship of the PLP to a K-12 Scaffolded Literacy Framework

RIDE strongly suggests that all school districts use the Personal Literacy Plans (PLP) Guidelines to guide the development of their PLP system. However, RIDE recognizes that the form and implementation of Personal Literacy Plans at the middle and high school level will be distinctly different from the implementation that takes place at the elementary level.

Accordingly, in elementary schools the expectation is that PLPs will be developed, maintained, and implemented for each student who is diagnostically assessed as reading below grade level. At the middle and high school level, a PLP should be included as one component of *Scaffolded Framework for Secondary Literacy*. Within this framework all students will receive *School-wide, Discipline-Specific Literacy Instruction*, some students will receive *Targeted Literacy Instruction*, and fewer students will receive *Intensive Literacy Instruction* that include the development of an individual PLP. **Figure 1** provides a graphic representation of the process a district should follow to diagnose students, make a student-by-student decision to determine the appropriate intervention(s), provide the intervention(s), and monitor the students' progress until they attain grade-level proficiency.

### Clarifying the PLP and HS Regulations Policy Initiatives for Targeted Literacy Instruction

By design, this *Targeted Literacy Instruction* should usually be organized to provide literacy services to groups of students, based on assessed learning needs. This is consistent with the intent of Regents' Regulations sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3. After considering the organizational structure of middle and high schools and the findings from public hearings, these regulations were crafted to ensure that students are assessed, receive instructional support, and have their progress monitored until they attain grade level proficiency. This will be achieved through literacy programs and specialized assistance. Similarly, in the PLP Guidelines, *Figure 1: Overview of K-12 School Reading Literacy Support* explicitly states that for the middle and high school level, "identified school personnel design plans to meet small group and/or individual student needs."

Accordingly, at the middle and high school level, students who, based on local assessments and criteria, are identified as needing *Targeted Literacy Instruction* do not require an individual PLP that documents the current instructional supports, intervention strategies, length /frequency of sessions, materials, procedures, and desired outcomes. However, students who receive services as part of *Targeted Literacy Instruction* must have a record of the screening, intervention, and progress monitoring results maintained. **Figure 3** illustrates a sample form for the level of record keeping required for class / group documentation.

### Clarifying the PLP and HS Regulations Policy Initiatives for Intensive Literacy Instruction

By design, this *Intensive Literacy Instruction* should be designed for individual students. This intensive instruction can, depending on the literacy strengths and needs of students, be delivered individually or in small groups. This individual focus on student needs is consistent with the intent of the Regents as well as the individual instruction component of the PLP. Accordingly, at the middle and high school level, individual PLPs should be developed for struggling readers who, based on local criteria, are identified with literacy needs significant enough to require *Intensive Literacy Instruction* from a Reading Specialist. These individual PLPs should follow the PLP Guidelines that describe how to document and plan the:

- ◆ current instructional supports,
- ◆ intervention strategies,
- ◆ expected length and frequency of sessions,
- ◆ materials, procedures, and desired outcomes.

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## **Suggested Criteria for Determining the Appropriate Literacy Services and Supports**

As the Regents' Regulations state: "Any student who continues to fall below grade level in reading and/or fails to attain proficiency in subsequent years on the state assessments designated by the Commissioner shall continue to receive specialized assistance until they attain the requisite proficiency." Accordingly, schools need to carefully analyze the results of their diagnostic assessments, processes, and other relevant student data. This analysis is essential to ensure that appropriate instructional interventions and supports are designed based on students' identified strengths and learning needs. As a general guideline, students reading one or two years below grade level should be considered for **Targeted Literacy Instruction**, and students who are identified as reading three or more years below grade level should be considered for **Intensive Literacy Instruction**, which includes the development of a PLP.

These grade-level guidelines are not intended to unduly restrict the flexibility that local districts need to make these programmatic choices for students. Schools / districts should consider these grade-level guidelines as a starting point for the student-by-student analysis needed to thoughtfully select the appropriate instructional intervention(s) to support students' literacy development. Consequently, it may be determined, based on local criteria, that some students reading one or two years below grade level require *Intensive Literacy Instruction* and a PLP. Similarly, it may be determined that some students reading three or more years below grade would benefit from *Targeted Literacy Instruction* that requires progress monitoring, but not a PLP. Some items that schools and districts should consider when making these student-by-student decisions as to the most suitable intervention(s) are:

- ◆ performance on state reading and writing assessments,
- ◆ results of district and school diagnostic assessments,
- ◆ students' grades,
- ◆ teacher referrals,
- ◆ the extent of the integration of the intervention into the overall learning experiences of students, and
- ◆ the nature, type, and severity of students' reading difficulties.

Some things that schools / districts should avoid are:

- ◆ tracking students based on reading proficiency,
- ◆ part-time remedial or pullout programs that use materials and strategies that are disconnected from the regular curricula and learning experiences of students.

Note: The number of years a students is reading below grade level is intended to serve as a general guideline or starting point for making student-by-student decisions about the most appropriate services and instruction to meet the literacy learning needs of individual students. All students identified who are not reading on grade level, whether they are reading 1, 2, or more years below grade level, must be supported until they can engage in grade-appropriate reading.

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## INITIAL GUIDANCE FEEDBACK SHEET

Name (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_ District (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

What additional information is needed in this initial guidance?

Is there any part of this initial guidance that is unclear or requires additional clarification?

Is there any part of this initial guidance that you would suggest omitting from future revisions of the guidance?

What additional information or technical assistance do you feel schools or districts will need to meet the literacy, graduation by proficiency, or restructuring aspects of the Regent's Regulations?

Please return your comments to Ruth Furia by email at [ide1548@ride.ri.net](mailto:ide1548@ride.ri.net)  
or by mail C/O RI Dept of Ed. 255 Westminster Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Providence, RI 02903.