

# **English Language Arts Program Evaluation Report K-2**

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### **Committee Members**

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### **Program Scope and Highlights**

The Bernards Township K-2 English Language Arts Program includes reading, writing, word study, vocabulary, grammar, handwriting, phonics, speaking, and listening. The program is organized as a curriculum for reading and a curriculum for writing with word study, grammar, vocabulary, handwriting, phonics, speaking and listening infused into each reading and writing unit. The Language Arts block is approximately two hours a day, although scheduling this time varies between buildings.

The prior Bernards Township K-5 English Language Arts Program Evaluation occurred eight years ago, with a report submitted in January 2008. There were thirteen members of the Steering Committee, covering all grade levels K-5, Special Education and Instructional Support. These teachers were divided among three defined committees: Writing, Reading and Materials. These committees worked to begin to align our curriculum with the NJDOE Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) and materials were updated during this revision process.

The current program revision continued approximately five years ago with a Steering Committee comprised of a variety of teachers from all four elementary schools who met throughout the 2011-2012 school year, planning for the summer curriculum rewrite, beginning with grades K-2, and continuing with grades 3-5 the following summer. During the first year of implementation (2012-2013), grade-level leaders in each elementary school gathered and submitted monthly feedback on the implementation of the curriculum. This was used during the following summer (2013) to revise the curriculum again for implementation during the 2013-2014 school year.

One of the recommendations of both the K-2 and 3-5 steering committee was to establish a word study committee to evaluate the word study approach and programs. The committee met over the course of two years and ultimately selected two programs to pilot during the 2013-2014 school year. The outcome of the pilot was the selection of the Fountas and Pinnell Word Study Program. During the summer of 2014, the K-2 curriculum was revised to incorporate lessons and assessments from this program. Teachers were trained over the course of two separate pull-out days and, as with the other curriculum implementation, teacher feedback was provided.

Two central foci of the curricula revisions were to align the Bernards Township School District's curriculum with the newly adopted Common Core State Standards (now the New Jersey Student Learning Standards), and increase the focus on reading and writing strategy instruction through the use of the Reading and Writing Workshop format rather than thematic units. Mentor texts were introduced as examples of quality literature; mini-lessons were generated to guide instruction, assessments were aligned with each standard; a new word study program (Fountas

and Pinnell Phonics Lessons) was implemented. Overall, there were significant improvements to the design of English language arts curriculum and instruction in the elementary schools.

Teachers were provided professional development in September 2012 during multiple pull-out trainings. The opportunity to learn and work together allowed the teachers a chance to understand the layout of the new curriculum, as well as examine and explore new materials. Teachers were also offered the option to “soft start” the new curriculum, commencing the school year with the old curriculum and then fully beginning the new curriculum in November. Grade Level Leaders completed marking period surveys, providing input on the new curriculum so adjustments could be made. At the end of the school year, a curriculum revision occurred, taking teacher suggestions into account.

In the summer of August 2016, an English Language Arts Program Evaluation began again to evaluate the effectiveness of our previous program changes and instruction updates. As a part of this effort, the committee researched comparable schools and literacy best practices. They also generated and administered surveys for teachers and parents. The English Language Arts Program Evaluation then synthesized the results of their survey and research to generate a series of program goals and recommendations.

### **Program Mission Statement and Vision**

**Mission** – The Bernards Township School District English language arts Program is committed to fostering reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills by empowering students to think logically and creatively.

**Vision** – The literature-based, developmentally-appropriate, student-centered curriculum encourages students to become lifelong strategic learners who take risks, make decisions and solve problems. To keep pace with globalization, technological advancements, and research on cognitive development, the curriculum utilizes effective teaching strategies. These strategies provide creative, authentic and meaningful English language arts experiences to accommodate various learning styles.

The Bernards Township School District is committed to the creation of student-centered classrooms. This environment nurtures the appreciation of language arts, encourages ownership of individual learning and enhances self-esteem through dynamic interaction with our language.

## **Analysis of Current Program**

### **READING**

In the fall of 2012, K-2 teachers implemented a workshop approach that promotes balanced literacy. Reading Workshop engages students in explicit direct instruction by the teacher through the use of mini lessons. Professional development was provided at the beginning of the school year. Each month focuses on a different genre, incorporating fiction, non-fiction and poetry in authentic ways. Strategy instruction is the guiding goal each month. During workshop time students meet in groups for Guided Reading or Book Clubs (grades 1-2) to read and discuss different texts with their teacher(s) and peers. Guided Reading typically starts mid-Kindergarten and continues through second grade. Students are placed into flexible groups based on performance on the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2). Teachers utilize leveled books from each school's guided reading closet for instruction, taking into account varying interests and motivation. Independent Reading is also a part of the workshop approach, providing students opportunities for self-selecting texts and practically applying reading strategies.

Teachers pull from a variety of resources to successfully implement the balanced literacy program. Mentor texts (big books, picture books, e-books) are provided by the district to model strategies using authentic literature during mini lessons. School book closets and district approved Internet sites provide resources for Guided Reading instruction. School/classroom libraries house a variety of genres and texts for students to independently apply Workshop strategies. Fountas & Pinnell's *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* serves as a teacher resource to improve instruction and student learning.

Kindergarten teachers make use of the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) assessment several times a year to screen student reading readiness skills. The DRA2 is administered to all students in grades K-2 throughout the school year to determine independent reading levels. A variety of informal assessments are used in the lower elementary grades including rubrics, running records, and anecdotal notes. In addition, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Assessment was incorporated in the 2016-2017 school year to assess first grade phonological skills. A Standards-Based Report Card (SBRC) was also developed and piloted during the 2016-2017 school year. It will expand to all first grade students in the 2017-2018 school year. The varied district assessments are analyzed and used to determine whether students are meeting grade level expectations as defined by the NJSL. These results are then reported out in the SBRC. District staff are currently working on Standard Based Report Cards for other grade levels.

## WRITING

The Writer's Workshop approach is utilized in grades K-2. It encourages students to write for a variety of audiences and purposes, both collaboratively and independently, creating a community of writers. Teachers coach students, empowering them to apply learned skills independently into their written work. Teacher mini-lessons direct students and set the tone for independent writing. Students continuously work through the writing process, planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing their work. The needs of students are assessed and teachers differentiate in a variety of ways, including group instruction, adjustment of work goals and varying work speed.

Each month focuses on a different genre, incorporating fiction, non-fiction and poetry in authentic ways. Strategy instruction is the guiding goal each month.

Lower elementary teachers reference several district resources. *Lucy Calkins: Units of Study* offers a grade-by-grade guide for teaching Writing Workshop so that students can successfully meet writing standards. Mentor texts for writing include a variety of trade books that are used to demonstrate and model specific writing skills. Poetry resources vary by grade level.

K-2 teachers assess student writing in a variety of ways. The District Writing Sample is administered three times a year in the Fall, Winter and Spring. Teachers meet during pull-out training sessions to discuss and score these writing pieces using a rubric as a guide. Along with the District Writing Sample, teachers confer with students during the school day in individual writing conferences. During this time, a teacher listens to a student's story, discussing what was done well and establishing a goal for future growth. Teachers record notes during these conferences as documentation of the discussion and goals.

## WORD STUDY

Beginning in September of 2014, K-2 teachers began utilizing the Fountas and Pinnell Phonics Word Study Program entitled, *Phonics: Letters, Words, and How They Work* developed by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. This was introduced after a three-year study conducted by a steering committee of teachers and reading specialists. Professional development training on the components and implementation of the program was provided at the start of the 2014 school year. Teachers now integrate the program into short lessons throughout their language arts instruction. These lessons focus on early literacy concepts, phonological awareness, letter knowledge, letter-sound relationships, word meanings, high frequency words, spelling patterns, word structure, and word-solving actions. Lessons are organized in a month by month scope and sequence.

The program resources consist of a book of minilessons, a supplemental poetry book, and a teaching resource binder comprised of an assessment guide, a phonics lessons CD-ROM, games, templates, picture cards, and letter/word cards. Multiple sets of magnetic letters provide hands-on manipulation of word study concepts.

One or more assessments from the program's assessment guide were chosen to be administered on a monthly basis. Other assessments from the guide can be used at the teacher's discretion. These assessments show student progress as well as determine future word study lessons.

### **GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY**

Grammar and vocabulary are infused into the reading and writing curriculum with specific words, concepts, lessons and assessments identified in each unit.

### **HOMEWORK**

Homework in the Bernards Township School District is used to reinforce learned skills. Our district homework policy states that "students in grades Kindergarten through two will be asked to spend approximately fifteen minutes per night completing homework." The main purpose of assigned homework is to "foster positive reading practices and reinforcement of class instruction." We honor established school recesses by not assigning homework during time off from school.

### **SPEAKING AND LISTENING**

In 2012, the International Literacy Association (ILA) curriculum was updated to include speaking and listening skills, per the Common Core State Standards. The two types of Speaking and Listening Standards are addressed in each unit of study. Comprehension and Collaboration Standards are covered within the reading and writing curriculum, giving teachers and students time to discuss and respond as a community of readers and writers. The Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas are addressed throughout the Reading and Writing Workshop. Mastery of the speaking and listening Standards develops as students move through the grades, enabling students to communicate effectively and respectfully.

Besides the resources used in Reading and Writing, no other resources were used specifically for Speaking and Listening. Rather, these Standards are integrated into the general English language arts curriculum.

Each standard is linked to an assessment to ensure growth. Teachers use anecdotal notes and rubrics to record and confirm progress. Although we have anecdotal notes on student progress, we do not have a third-party measure of student progress.

## **Prior Goals and Progress**

The 2008 K-5 English Language Arts Program Evaluation identified nine main goals for improving the BTSD English Language Arts Program. Noted below are the goals and the subsequent growth.

- Goal # 1:** Add writing objectives for all of the thematic units for all grades.  
**Progress:** Objectives were created for each thematic units. When the curriculum was updated in 2012, Units of Study replaced thematic units. New objectives were written to align with the CCCS.
- Goal #2:** Generate a comprehensive list of writing mini-lesson for a variety of purposes (mechanics, process, management, fiction, non-fiction, poetry, other) for teachers to reference during writing instruction.  
**Progress:** Lists of writing mini-lessons were created for teacher use. They have since been integrated into the updated English language arts curriculum in the monthly units.
- Goal #3:** Update writing portfolio. Create a new “tracking sheet” to track the required writing pieces throughout the school year.  
**Progress:** Portfolio “tracking sheets” were created. Currently formal district writing portfolios are no longer utilized. Teachers and students track writing and organize it in a portfolio at their discretion in their own classrooms.
- Goal #4:** Establish expectations for core and supplemental titles.  
**Progress:** Expectations were established and noted in the curriculum so teachers knew when to implement core and supplemental texts in their instruction.
- Goal #5:** Evaluate levels of books and materials for differentiation.  
**Progress:** Books and materials were leveled according to grade level appropriateness. This was the beginning of the use of a leveling system in Bernards Township, which remains to this day.
- Goal #6:** Evaluate material needs.  
**Progress:** English language arts materials were evaluated, and subsequently changed, eliminated, or updated.
- Goal #7:** Initiate grade-level discussions and cross grade-level discussions.  
**Progress:** This remains a need in all grade levels, particularly for grade level conversation among schools. There is still room for continued communication and collaboration regarding curriculum. Articulation between grades within each school (vertical articulation) would be helpful as well.
- Goal #8:** Research and order new core supplemental titles.  
**Progress:** New titles were ordered as a result of the program evaluation and again after curriculum revisions.

**Goal #9:** Construct a list of “Reading Mini-lessons.”  
**Progress:** A “Reading Mini-lesson” chart was created and distributed to all teachers for reference. Many mini-lessons from this list have been incorporated into the current curriculum.

### **Program Comparisons and Best Practices**

Using the New Jersey School Performance Report from each Bernards Township Elementary School as a guide, a variety of New Jersey School Districts were identified for comparison. It is difficult to find significant similarities among multiple schools compared to all four of our elementary schools except for West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District. Mount Prospect is compared to a completely different set of schools due to their student demographic. While Cedar Hill, Oak Street and Liberty Corner Schools are all compared with the Bridgewater-Raritan School District, Oak Street School is compared to different elementary schools within the Bridgewater-Raritan School District than Liberty Corner and Cedar Hill Schools. Overall, the elementary schools in Bernards Township have different populations, making it difficult to choose five identical schools for comparison. The following chart outlines some of the comparison schools.

<b>Cedar Hill</b>	<b>Liberty Corner</b>	<b>Mount Prospect</b>	<b>Oak Street</b>
West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional: Maurice Hawk Elementary School	West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional: Maurice Hawk Elementary School	West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional: JVB Wicoff Elementary School	West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional: Village Elementary School
Bridgewater-Raritan Regional: Hamilton Elementary School	Bridgewater-Raritan Regional: Hamilton Elementary School	Warren Township: Angelo L. Tomaso, Mt. Horeb and Woodland Schools	Bridgewater-Raritan Regional: Crim and Van Holten Elementary Schools
Princeton: Littlebrook School	Princeton: Littlebrook School	Livingston Township: Collins and Riker Hill Elementary Schools	New Providence: Allen W. Roberts School
Ridgewood Village: Orchard Elementary School	Ridgewood Village: Orchard Elementary School	School District of the Chathams: Southern Boulevard School	Chester Township: Bragg Elementary School

Because the committee could not find similar schools from the NJ School Performance Report for all four of the district’s elementary schools, we researched high-performing school districts from our area. The goal was to locate English language arts curricula component commonalities



between our district and others. The five main researched districts are Bernardsville, Bridgewater-Raritan, Princeton, Ridgewood, and West Windsor-Plainsboro.

Below is a brief profile of each school district taken from the respective School Report Card:

Bernards Township School District is a high-achieving school district. All four of our district elementary schools are ranked in the top 70 in New Jersey according to a 2016 Niche report. Ridge High School is ranked 21st in New Jersey according to the 2016 US News and World Report. There are approximately 1884 students attending Ridge High School with a 25% minority population. Only 1% of students are considered economically disadvantaged.

Bernardsville School District is a neighboring K-12 public school district in Somerset County. Bernards High School serves 793 students and is ranked 18th within New Jersey, according to the 2016 US News and World Report. Twenty three percent of students are minorities and 9% are considered economically disadvantaged.

Bridgewater-Raritan Regional School District is a K-12 regional district in Somerset County with approximately 2,900 students at the high school level. Bridgewater-Raritan High School is unranked according to the US News and World Report. The district has a 32% minority population and 9% economically disadvantaged.

Princeton Public Schools is a comprehensive community public school district in Mercer County serving students in pre-Kindergarten through twelfth grade. The district is composed of 6 schools. The high school educates approximately 1469 students. According to the 2016 US News and World Report, Princeton High School is ranked 10th in the state with a 38% minority population.

Ridgewood School District is a K-12 district in Bergen County. There are approximately 1700 students at the high school. According to the 2016 US News and World Report, Ridgewood High School is ranked 25th in the state with a 29% minority population. One percent of the school population is classified as economically disadvantaged. Therefore, very similar demographics exist at Ridgewood High School and Ridge High School.

West-Windsor Plainsboro School District serves students in Mercer and Middlesex Counties. This high performing district has approximately 1610 students in each of two high schools. The high schools are ranked 27th in the state according to the 2016 US News and World Report. The population consists of 66% minorities and 4% of students are considered economically disadvantaged.

After researching several outside districts, the committee’s overall conclusion is that the Bernards Township School District employs many of the same curricular approaches as other high-performing districts. The following chart displays the results from the website review. The five main comparison districts (West Windsor- Plainsboro, Bernardsville, Princeton, Ridgewood, and Bridgewater-Raritan) as well as other high-performing ones, were included for comparison.

	ELL ELA Instructional Support	Reading/ Writing Workshop	Guided Reading	Guided Writing	Word Study / Phonics Program	Reading Conference	Writing Conference	ELA Enrichment Programs	ELA Instructional Time (in minutes)
Bernards Twp	X	X	X		X	X	X		120
Bernardsville	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		150
Bridgewater-Raritan	X		X		X			X	
Chatham	X	X	X	X					
Chester		X	X				X		
Glen Rock	X				X				
Livingston	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Montgomery		X	X	X	X			X	
Mountain Lakes	X	X	X	X	X				
New Providence	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		80
Princeton		X	X	X		X	X		90
Ridgewood	X	X	X		X				
Upper Saddle River*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Warren Township	X	X			X				
West Windsor-Plainsboro	X	X	X	X		X	X		150

\*1 of 4 elementary sending districts for Northern Highlands Regional HS

## **Best Practices in Literacy Education**

In an effort to identify best practices in literacy education, the Committee looked at the National Reading Panel Report, The Carnegie Corporation Report, a study from the *School Psychology Review, Evidence Supporting "Best Practices:" Expert Judgement and Meta-analysis*, and The Report of the Governor's Task Force on Early Literacy Education. The findings and how they relate to our school district are summarized below.

### **Best Practices for Reading Instruction**

According to the National Reading Panel, research studies identify five areas of effective instructional reading approaches essential to a successful reading program. These best practices include instruction in alphabetics, fluency, comprehension, teacher education and reading instruction, and technology in reading instruction.

The first best practice is alphabetics which encompasses phonemic awareness and phonics instruction. National Reading Panel research shows that phonemic awareness and letter knowledge are two predictors of early reading success. The studies clearly showed that phonemic awareness instruction could improve children's phonemic awareness. In addition, phonemic awareness teaching was beneficial to children in the early stages of learning to read. This instruction led to higher achievement in early reading and spelling, and improved the reading skills of word recognition and reading comprehension.

The Bernards Township School District teachers work hard to integrate phonemic awareness and letter knowledge instruction beginning in Kindergarten and continuing through the lower elementary grades. Letters of the week, letter books, oral sound manipulation practice, hearing and recording sounds in words, rhyming games and computer practice with letters and sounds on websites such as ABCya.com all help students become confident in their letter/sound knowledge. One district resource, Fountas and Pinnell *Phonics*, provides activities for classroom teachers to incorporate the word study curriculum. Sound manipulation, including blending and segmenting sounds successfully, guides instruction. Recently added to teachers' repertoire of activities is the 95% Program. This program enables teachers to group students with like phonological needs for focused, explicit instruction. This instruction occurs primarily during the "WIN," or "What I Need," period of the day.

Fluency is the second best practice identified for an effective reading program. Fluent readers can read text with automaticity, accuracy, and prosody. Current research demonstrates a correlation between reading fluency and reading comprehension. Disfluent readers can struggle to make meaning from text which can curtail comprehension. The Panel identifies Guided Oral Reading as a specific practice that is effective for fluency development across a range of grade levels. This strategy helps students to recognize new words, read accurately and comprehend what they read.

Fluency is an important aspect of reading instruction in the Bernards Township School District. Kindergarten through second grade students engage in repeated readings of familiar text to practice phrasing and word identification. Beginning in Kindergarten, students learn to link the

words “the” and “a” to the next word, generating two-word phrases. In first and second grades, readers build longer phrases while reading with expression to convey meaning. Reading poems, reciting nursery rhymes and singing songs are integrated into regular English language arts experiences to develop fluency. Additionally, Reader’s Theater, an activity in which students “perform” scripts originally derived from texts, is an entertaining activity that first and second grade teachers employ to practice phrasing and expression.

Comprehension instruction is an essential component to a child’s reading development. The National Reading Panel identifies several subtopics within comprehension including vocabulary instruction, text comprehension, and teacher preparation and comprehension strategies. According to the panel, reading programs must include explicit comprehension instruction to support developing readers. Teachers should receive ongoing training to implement a variety of systematic strategies to help students make meaning of text.

Comprehension instruction is noticeable in our district classrooms. Kindergartners retell stories to each other, including story elements (characters, setting, problem and solution.) The comprehension skill of sequencing is practiced using puppets and acting out books. First graders utilize retelling ropes to aid in the addition of details when talking about what they have read. They also write about what they read, retelling events in order with specific details and terms. Second graders begin to learn about comprehension strategies such as visualizing, asking questions, inferring, and making connections. The amount of written response increases so that they can practice applying these newly learned comprehension strategies.

### Best Practices for Professional Development

Another cited best practice is teacher education and professional development. The National Panel states that teacher preparedness for both new and established educators does produce higher achievement in students. Based on their research, it is recommended that teachers receive long-term support to effectively carry out new instructional methods. At the time of the report, it had yet to be determined what form of teacher training was deemed to be most effective and further research was still needed in this area.

An additional research report, *The Carnegie Corporation Report*, conducted a study to find what makes a successful literacy program close the gap in education. Providing more professional development is essential. While the report acknowledges the high cost of this commitment, the benefits outweigh the negatives. The Report calls upon districts to ensure effective literacy professional development to both principals and teachers.

Bernards Township works to provide professional development to its teachers during the school year. District ELA pull-out trainings, conducted by the Bernards Township Reading Specialists during the school day have focused on different topics. Reader’s and Writer’s Workshop and Word Study trainings are three such district trainings. Reading Specialists have also offered school-based trainings such as improving the administration and analyzation of information in the DRA2. In 2017, Reading Specialists conducted a three-part training on administering running records to assess student reading progress and analyze reading errors to guide future

strategy lessons. In addition to these trainings, Reading Specialists also provide new staff with extra hands-on, one on one curricular and management support in their classrooms. In previous years, classroom teachers were encouraged to attend out of district workshops that were paid for by the district. Due to monetary concerns, though, this practice was eliminated. In recent years, school PTOs have supported requests by teachers for training through PTO Grants enabling some schools to hire outside staff developers. One such trainer, Cyndi Castello-Brattesson has taught various classes to staff from all four elementary schools. Topics included guided reading, phonemic awareness, fluency and informational reading strategies. In the 2016-2017 school year, the Oak Street PTO sponsored a visiting poet who provided both student workshops and teacher staff development.

### Best Practices for Technology Integration

The National Reading Panel also examines the integration of technology to teach reading. However, at the time the National Reading Panel report was published, little research had been done on the effects of computer technology for reading instruction. The Massachusetts Reading Association published a report entitled “Examining Teachers’ Perceptions About and Integration of Technology within Literacy Instruction” which compiles the results of many recent studies. In 2009, the International Reading Association (IRA) developed a position statement on the critical importance of infusing technology into reading instruction. They determine that different literacy skills are required of each new form of digital technology. Today, students should be exposed to technologies such as blogs, podcasts, e-books, email, and wikis. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI, 2010) “calls on teachers to prepare students to use digital tools and texts for reading, writing, information gathering, and learning, thus reflecting the growing understanding that attention to students’ digital literacies is critical in today’s literacy classroom.” Several recommendations that support the integration of technology and reading instruction are given, including providing professional development and support for teachers, integrating new literacies of the internet into assessments of reading and writing, and exploring new instructional models for integrating the Internet and other new technologies.

Technology integration into the K-2 classroom varies by building. All classrooms have interactive whiteboards, which were recently updated and replaced for better efficiency and accuracy. Students work interactively on these whiteboards, integrating technology with learning. Some schools have a few Chromebooks for each primary classroom, while others are told K-2 students are not allowed access to the Chromebooks. Still other classrooms have shared access to carts with other classes and grades, but it can be difficult for primary classrooms to gain access due to grades 3-5 having priority access. Most K-2 classrooms do not have permanent computers. Ebooks were purchased during the previous curriculum rewrite, and are used to share books with the class on the whiteboard. Reading A-Z is a district-supported online resource that students can access to read books, practicing reading comprehension and fluency skills. Unfortunately, without consistent access to technology, not all students can access this resource during the school day.

### Best Practices for Vocabulary Instruction

Additionally, the National Reading Panel identifies vocabulary instruction as an essential component of reading instruction and a critical factor in reading comprehension. Best practice suggests students benefit from direct instruction and frequent encounters with carefully chosen words. Rote memorization is not helpful in terms of retention, but opportunities to connect with words in meaningful ways does increase retention. Independent reading remains the most effective way to expand vocabulary knowledge, but this puts struggling readers at a disadvantage when they are not reading the same quantity of text as their more advanced peers nor are they reading books with as much rich vocabulary. Therefore, it is essential that direct vocabulary instruction is included in a balanced literacy program.

In Bernards Township, vocabulary is infused in the English language arts program. Standards in each unit focus on text-based vocabulary acquisition but there are variations among the schools and classrooms in how vocabulary is incorporated and taught, based on school goals and school populations. ELL (English Language Learner) students and struggling readers need additional direct instruction while all students need both direct instruction and lessons in incidental learning of vocabulary.

### Best Practices for Writing Instruction

The Summer Program Evaluation Committee also looked at best practices for evidence-based writing instruction. One study published in the *School Psychology Review* (2013), describes an array of effective practices that should be implemented to provide strong writing instruction. Researchers identify the following approaches for improving student writing achievement: daily writing practice, strategy instruction, self-regulation and metacognitive reflection, peer collaboration, and regular feedback through formative assessment. Unfortunately, at the completion of the study, researchers concluded that most schools do not provide the necessary and ongoing professional development to support the effectiveness of these practices.

There was also analysis done on the best, research-based instructional practices for teaching students about words and sentences. Described in the report, *Evidence Supporting “Best Practices”*: *Expert Judgement and Meta-analysis* (2010), strong writing instruction in this area is best learned through guided writing, word-making, sentence-making and sentence combining. These practices are more effective than traditional rote practice or isolated English Language learning.

Daily writing is the cornerstone of writing instruction in our district. Students work through the writing process of brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing and publishing when they create stories, letters, notes, poems, how to stories and non-fiction books, They manage time on their own, noting what they do well and areas they should work to improve. Peer collaboration regularly occurs through all stages of the writing process. Teachers meet with students, conferencing on their written work, setting goals and collecting information to inform their instruction. While staff development for writing instruction occurs in the district, it is minimal and is an area that can be improved.

### Best Practices for Word Study

Word Study is an approach that enables students to explore and learn word patterns rather than memorize unconnected words. It allows students the opportunity to investigate and understand patterns in words, letter-sound relationships, word meaning, word structure, and phonics. When researching best practices for word study, the research discusses primarily phonics within reading and spelling. Phonics is the ability to read by associating sounds with groups of letters in an alphabetic writing system. It is a foundational skill needed to be a successful reader. In the last, largest review of best phonics practices in the general education setting, the National Reading Panel (2000) declares synthetic (teaching of letters and individual sounds) as the most effective approach, especially for students who struggle with reading. With this in mind, research also suggests that passively memorizing rules and patterns will not improve reading or writing (Gentry, 2017). Students need to apply their knowledge in their own reading and writing to internalize and fully understand conventional language.

As stated, Bernards Township has adopted an analogy-based phonics program that teaches students to use known letters or letter groups to decode unknown words. This resource used to create our program is called *Phonics: Letters, Words, and How They Work* developed by Fountas & Pinnell.

### Best Practices for Handwriting

Research presented at the 2012 Handwriting Educational Summit states that this skill supports both cognitive development and overall academic achievement. The act of writing by hand significantly activates the brain. The recommendation that students continue handwriting instruction beyond grade 1 allows for the opportunity to gain fluency and automaticity which then significantly improves writing ability and production because students are better able to focus on planning, organization, and style of writing.

The Bernards Township English Language Arts Program includes the use of a Zaner Bloser manuscript handwriting program in grades K-2. Students are taught the appropriate size, shape, and spacing of letter formation. This is then reinforced in daily writing assignments.

### Best Practices for Homework

The most effective amount of homework for students in grades K-2 is the rule of 10, meaning the grade multiplied by ten is the appropriate amount of time (ex. 2nd grade x 10 = 20 minutes of homework per day) (Cooper, 2006). The National Education Association (NEA) and National PTA support this policy. The recommendations state homework should be routine and work that students can do on their own. While the recommendations do not specify which subjects to assign for homework, research does show the importance of reading at home. The U.S. Department of Education (1999) found that, generally, the more students read for fun on their own time, the higher their reading scores are. The Educational Testing Services (1999) reported that students who do more reading at home are better readers and have higher math scores. Nagy

Anderson, and Herman (1987) emphasized the importance of reading at least 20 minutes per day at home. This twenty minutes a day improves reading and test scores (see chart below).

Importance of Reading 20 Minutes a Day at Home

Student A	Student B	Student C
Reads 20 minutes per day	Reads 5 minutes per day	Reads 1 minute per day
3600 minutes per school year	900 minutes per school year	180 minutes per school year
1,800,000 words	282,000 words	8,000 words
10 whole school days of reading	2 whole school days of reading	
By the end of 6 <sup>th</sup> grade-60 whole school days of reading	By the end of 6 <sup>th</sup> grade-12 whole school days	
90 <sup>th</sup> percentile	50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	10 <sup>th</sup> percentile

Source: Nagy, Anderson, Herman (1987 )

Moving Forward with Best Practices

*The Report of the Governor's Task Force on Early Literacy Education* identifies best practices and approaches and then recommends how New Jersey can move forward in their early literacy programs. The research shows that effective schools have strong leadership, put students first, and use data to increase student learning. Professional development, teacher collaboration and maintaining small class size also contribute to effectiveness, as do strong parental relationships.

The Report identifies that best practices show effective teachers use multiple titles of rich literature and create meaningful literacy experiences. The balance between teacher- and student-led discussions, along with plenty of time to read is important to a strong literacy program. Effective teachers are able to integrate a word study/phonics program into reading and writing instruction. Teachers utilize assessment to drive instruction that is explicit and direct, building a whole class community to increase students' schema.

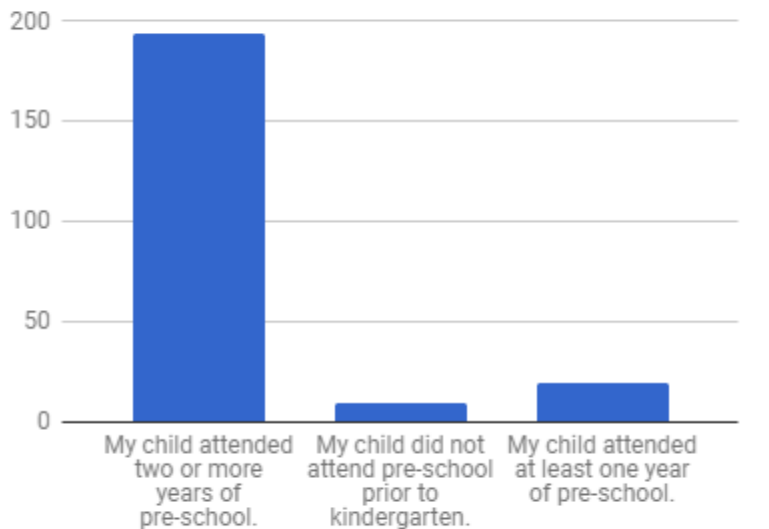


## Survey Results

Several surveys were created and disseminated as a way to gather feedback about our curricular programs. Surveys were sent to parents and teachers. After some discussion, it was decided that students in the K-2 age range would not be surveyed.

**Parent Data:** An elementary district program survey was administered to parents in May 2017. Two hundred and twenty two K-2 parents responded. An analysis of these results provides a great deal of information regarding the district’s English language arts program. Below are some notable results.

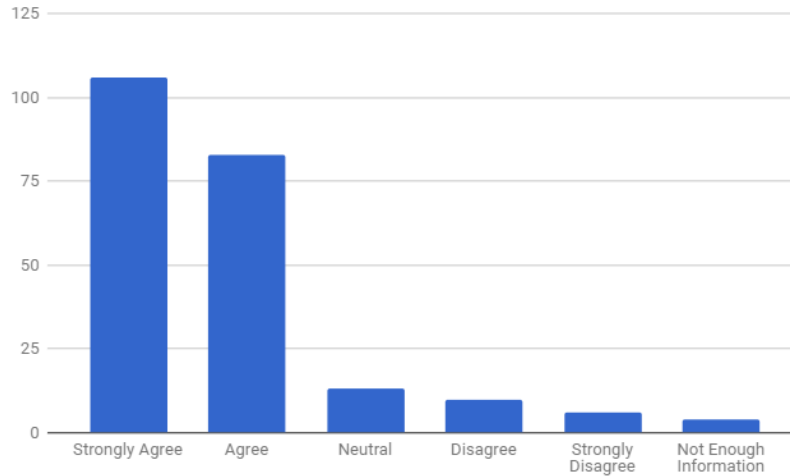
Student Preschool Experience (as reported by parents)



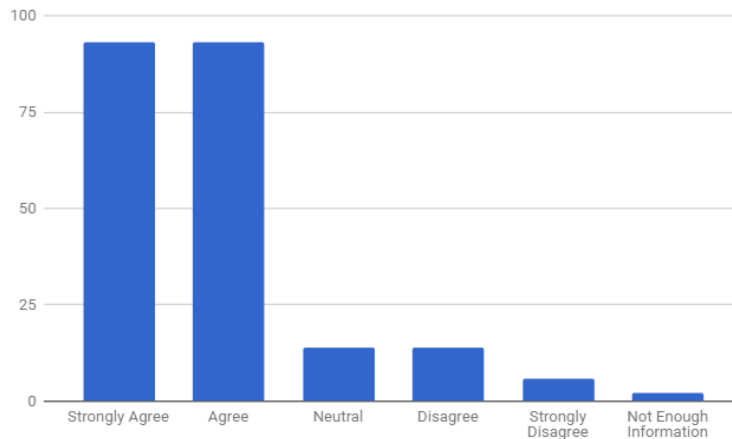
85.6 % of the parents report that their child attended 2 or more years of preschool prior to entering kindergarten. Pre-school attendance develops emotional, academic and social skills, thus building a strong foundation for kindergarten success. According to W. Steven Barnett, PhD, the director of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), “Children who attend high-quality preschool enter kindergarten with better pre-reading skills, richer vocabularies, and stronger basic math skills than those who do not.”

When reviewing the survey results relating to Reading and Writing, parents are generally pleased with the English language arts instruction in the district. Specifically, they report an 84-88% satisfaction rate with their child’s reading progress and learning experiences. When delving deeper into the subject of Reading, 85% of respondents stated that their child made appropriate Reading progress. In addition, 83% of parents also note that their children enjoy Reading. Overall, the approval ratings for Reading consistently fall within the above average range. See related charts below.

Appropriate Progress in Reading (as reported by parents)

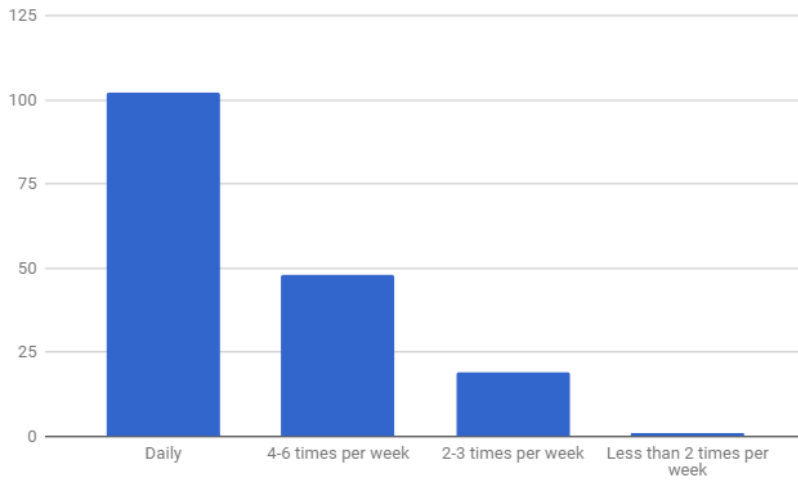


Enjoyment of Reading Experiences (as reported by parents)



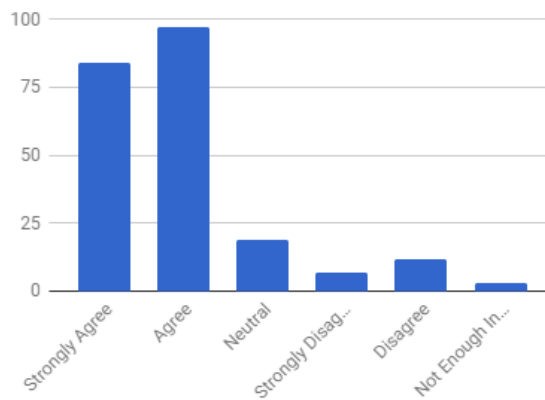
In addition, many parents (68%) report that their children read at home with an adult or independently between 4 to 7 days a week. Regular at home reading helps children build their vocabulary, improve their understanding of text and practice their reading strategies, thus allowing for consistent and steady reading growth. In the November 2000 edition of School Library Media Research Journal, Bernice Cullinan analyzed many studies and concluded that “research supports the fact that during primary and elementary grades, even a small amount of independent reading helps increase students’ reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, spelling facility, understanding of grammar, and knowledge of the world.” Frequent, self-selected reading is encouraged at both home and school in grades K-2 in Bernards Township.

Frequency of reading at home (as reported by parents)

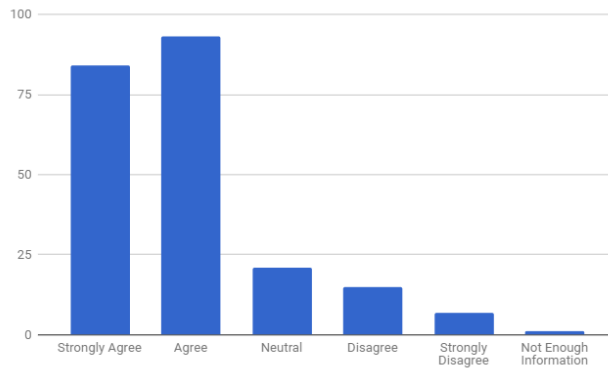


Overall satisfaction with writing progress is also high, although slightly lower than reading. Specifically, parents report a satisfaction rate in the 80 percent range with their child’s writing progress and learning experiences. The satisfaction rate for writing progress was 79%, and 76% of parents note that their children enjoy Writing. See related charts below.

Appropriate Progress in Writing (as reported by parents)



Enjoyment of Writing Experiences (as reported by parents)

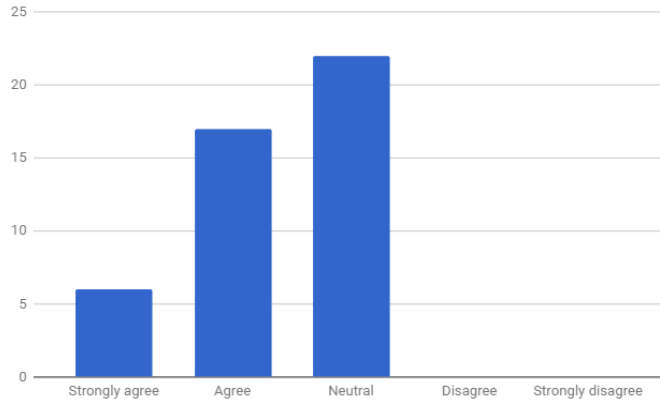


**Teacher Data:** An elementary district program survey was administered to teachers in November 2016. Fifty-six K-2 teachers responded. An analysis of these results provides a great deal of information regarding the district’s English language arts program. Below are some notable results.

First, teachers report that our primary reading assessment, the DRA2, is used regularly to inform instruction. Delving deeper into its use, 74.1% of the respondents state that they use the DRA2 to find commonalities amongst students, and 88.9% use it to identify weaknesses. These commonalities and weaknesses then inform future reading instruction. In addition to informing instruction, 72.2% of the teachers who responded to the survey use the DRA2 data to inform parents, and 81.5% use the information at Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) meetings. The importance of authentic reading assessment data, such as the results our district teachers glean from the DRA2, is evidenced by this teacher survey.

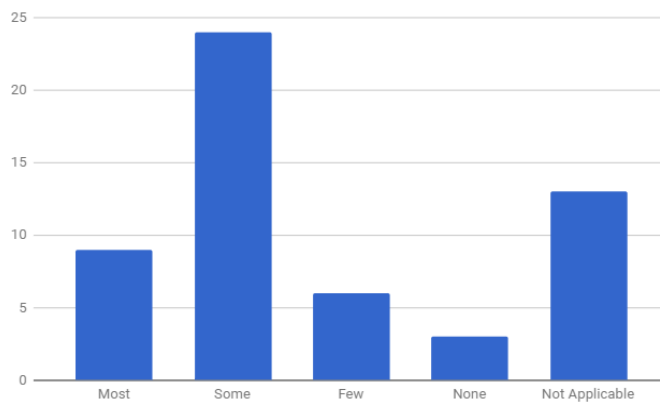
When considering how prepared new students are when entering a classroom in September, 48.2% of teachers either strongly agree or agree that their new students are prepared for the new grade level. Almost just as many, though, 46.4%, are neutral in their feeling.

Academic Preparedness of Incoming Students (as reported by teachers)



“Summer slide,” or loss in academic skills and knowledge over the summer vacation, is often a concern for teachers. 16.1% of teachers feel that most students’ reading levels backslide from June to September, while 44.6% feel that some students’ reading levels decline. Because of this summer slide, teachers spend significant time during the first weeks of school reviewing previous material to help gain back this lost learning. Please refer to the test data section for more information regarding the summer slide.

Students Beginning of the Year Decline in Reading Level (as reported by teachers)  
June to September\*



\*Not Applicable responses were reported by Kindergarten teachers.

Teachers report an interest in professional development in English language arts. Although training and workshops within district are valuable, approximately 66% of teachers feel they would benefit from attending educational conferences and workshops outside of the district.

Additionally, 59% of teachers are interested in receiving additional training from literacy specialists. Articulation is also a common request among teachers, with 40-50% of teachers requesting time for grade level collaboration, vertical articulation between grade levels, and cross-town meetings to allow for more communication and collaboration across the district elementary schools.

Kindergarten teachers feel they would most benefit from professional development on helping struggling readers and writers (64%), vocabulary instruction (64%), and phonological awareness (55%). First grade teachers indicated an interest in writing workshop (100%), enriching gifted readers and writers (100%), phonological awareness (90%), and guided reading instruction (75%). Finally, second grade teachers were interested in enriching gifted readers and writers (91%), reading and writing conferences (77%), helping struggling readers and writers (69%) and vocabulary instruction (69%). In all grades, many teachers also felt they would benefit from professional development to better help ELL (English Language Learner) students, as the district's elementary schools have seen an increase in ELL students in the last several years. In June 2013, there were 24 elementary ELL students, while in June 2017, that number had expanded to 38. While not counted in the ELL number, there are also many additional students gaining fluency in their English skills if a different language is spoken at home. It greatly impacts all areas of the ELA curriculum. As noted from the teacher survey, differentiated professional development opportunities are requested by the district's elementary teachers.

After reviewing the parent and teacher surveys, some generalizations about the district English language arts program are noted. Overall, parents are pleased with the English language arts instruction at the K-2 level. They feel that their children make good reading progress and enjoy the act of reading. Lower satisfaction rates occur with the writing subject area though.

## Test Results

### **End of Year DRA Results 2013-2017**

The Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2) scores for kindergarten through second grade for the years 2013-2017 are shown below. Scores are categorized by a range of above grade level, on grade level, just below grade level, and well below grade level.

### **End of Year DRA Data**

<b>DRA Grade 2</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Above Grade Level	65%	71%	66%	55%	55%
On Grade Level	11%	16%	19%	29%	29%
Just Below Grade Level	6%	7%	8%	8%	8%
Well Below Grade Level	7%	6%	6%	8%	8%

<b>DRA Grade 1</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Above Grade Level	73%	70%	72%	70%	69%
On Grade Level	11%	12%	14%	13%	12%
Just Below Grade Level	5%	9%	8%	7%	6%
Well Below Grade Level	11%	8%	6%	10%	14%

<b>DRA Grade K</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Above Grade Level	80%	83%	79%	85%	83%
On Grade Level	13%	13%	14%	10%	11%
Just Below Grade Level	4%	3%	4%	3%	4%
Well Below Grade Level	2%	1%	3%	2%	2%

When reviewing these results, it is noted that students in grades K-2 are consistently reading on or above grade level by the end of the school year, with the majority of the students reading above grade level. Furthermore, it can be noted that kindergarten tended to have the largest percentage of students above grade level across all four years when compared to grades 1 and 2.

A possible reason attributing to such scores is that 85.6% of our students enter Elementary school with 2 or more years of preschool experience helping to build a strong language arts foundation. This strong foundation could attribute to students surpassing kindergarten reading level expectations or exit goals for the end of the year. In addition, the implementation of a full day kindergarten program in Bernards Township allows for a greater amount of time to be spent on English language arts instruction.

### Summer Slide Data

Noted below is the percentage of students whose fall reading level increased, decreased or was maintained when compared to spring reading levels. Data was collected for Kindergarten through second grade students for the years 2013-2017. Scores are categorized by a range of above grade level, on grade level, just below grade level, and well below grade level.

#### Summer Slide Data

<b>Grade 2 into 3</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Maintained or increased reading level	79%	72%	80%	81%
Decreased 1 reading level	16%	12%	16%	14%
Decreased more than 1 level	5%	16%	4%	5%

<b>Grade 1 into 2</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Maintained or increased reading level	83%	75%	83%	77%
Decreased 1 reading level	12%	19%	14%	18%
Decreased more than 1 level	5%	6%	3%	4%

<b>Grade K-1</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Maintained or increased reading level	77%	84%	79%	78%
Decreased 1 reading level	20%	14%	15%	15%
Decreased more than 1 level	4%	2%	6%	7%

When reviewing these results, it is noted that a large percentage of students maintained or increased reading levels from the end of one school year to the start of the next. One possible reason for a decreased by one reading level could be due to a summer slide. Research confirms that summer slide is real because of the lack of academics during the summer months necessary to maintain the progress the students made over the school year. McCombs and colleagues (2011) state that “elementary students' performance falls by about a month during the summer.” One month loss could mean one, two, or even more levels lost, as shown in the charts above by those students who decreased by one level as well as those who decreased by more than one level. To some students this is a significant loss, especially the struggling readers. Mraz & Rasinski (2007) state that “summer reading loss seems to have its greatest impact on low-achieving students and at-risk students – those who can least afford to fall further behind.” However, research does show there are ways to prevent this summer slide: educational summer programs and parental involvement. Another possible reason for a decrease by one level or more than one level could be due to the subjectivity and teacher judgement when scoring the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2).



### District Writing Sample Data

Noted below are District Writing Sample (DWS) scores for kindergarten through second grade for the years 2013-2017. Scores are categorized by a range of above grade level, on grade level, just below grade level, and well below grade level.

#### Spring District Writing Sample Scores

<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Above Grade Level	58%	63%	67%	61%	55%
On Grade Level	24%	22%	18%	21%	25%
Just Below Grade Level	6%	11%	7%	12%	11%
Well Below Grade Level	4%	5%	8%	7%	8%

<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Above Grade Level	60%	60%	67%	55%	57%
On Grade Level	23%	23%	18%	24%	16%
Just Below Grade Level	8%	9%	7%	10%	12%
Well Below Grade Level	9%	8%	8%	12%	15%

<b>Grade K</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Above Grade Level	83%	85%	72%	77%	70%
On Grade Level	9%	8%	10%	11%	11%
Just Below Grade Level	5%	3%	8%	4%	12%
Well Below Grade Level	4%	4%	10%	7%	7%

When reviewing these results, it is noted that students in grades K-2 are consistently writing on or above grade level by the end of the school year, with the majority of the students reading above grade level.

A possible reason attributing such high scores could be that 85.6% of the students come to the district with two or more years of preschool experience. Also, the district writing rubric was developed prior to the implementation of Common Core Standards and New Jersey Learning Standards, thus the rubrics for assessing writing may not be as rigorous as the district's expectations.

## **Goals/Recommendations**

Below are goals and recommendations from the K-2 English language arts program evaluation committee. These goals and recommendations were developed after careful consideration and analysis of surveys, assessments, neighboring districts and best practices.

**Goal #1:** Investigate developmentally appropriate ways to increase K-2 student and teacher access to technology in order to advance students as readers and writers, as well as provide teachers with data to inform and drive instruction.

### **Problem Statement:**

Currently there is not a consistent number of Chromebooks at the K-2 level in each school. It is difficult for teachers in some schools to access computers for class use while other schools have more computers available for use.

### **Supporting Data:**

Studies by the International Reading Association (2009) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2013) explored technology in the classroom. Their findings show “that in order to participate in higher education and 21st century workplaces, students must be prepared to use sophisticated digital technologies for a variety of purposes” (Massachusetts Reading Association, 2016). Integrating computer usage into some classroom assignments allows for our students to begin to learn how to use these technologies for a “variety of purposes.”

Computers also help teachers to differentiate instruction. One way that computers can do this is to provide a scaffold for children learning to read and write. For example, a student who struggles with phonics skills or vocabulary can benefit from an online dictionary that can speak a word and provide its meaning. In addition, students who have a hard time phrasing text when reading out loud can have the computer highlight phrases as a model for fluency. (Technology and Teaching Children To Read, 2004) Use of the district purchased Reading A-Z program would also increase with access to Chromebooks. We have become a technological society, but teacher access to computer use is currently limited.

### **Proposed Solutions:**

- Investigate emerging research findings on digital literacy.
- Ensure that K-2 teachers can regularly access Chromebook carts for their classroom. This may entail increasing the number of Chromebook carts per school.

**Goal #2:** Prepare teachers to implement and execute literacy best practices through purposeful professional development and collaboration.

**Problem Statement:**

While elementary staff receive in-house professional development provided by district employees, classroom teachers have limited access to outside professional development. Currently, money is not allocated for outside professional development to come to our district to train our elementary staff. As a result, classroom teachers are generally discouraged from attending outside professional development workshops due to district monetary constraints.

**Supporting Data:**

When surveying teachers in the district about professional development needs, 66% of the respondents stated that they felt they would benefit from attending educational conferences and workshops outside of the district. By attending workshops outside of our district, teachers learn new instructional strategies and participate in conversations with other educators from nearby districts. Without this infusion of renewed energy, instruction can become static and result in limited professional growth for the teachers and slower academic growth for the students.

A Generation Ready report entitled “Raising Student Achievement Through Professional Development” states that “The most powerful way to raise student achievement is through professional learning. More than ever before, students need effective teaching if they are to develop the higher order thinking skills they will need to be career and college ready in the 21st century.” Gaining outside insight about the art of teaching and cutting edge instructional strategies motivates teachers to apply what they have learned. Without this infusion of renewed energy, instruction can become stagnant and result in limited professional growth for the teachers and slower academic growth for the students.

**Proposed Solutions:**

- Invest in outside literacy professional development who can offer in-district training for K-2 staff to enhance student learning and achievements.

One strong professional development program is offered through Columbia University’s Teachers’ College: The Reading and Writing Project in New York City. Through this program, staff developers from the Reading and Writing Project come provide training right in our district. There are different options in terms of how to structure this staff development, based on district need. Essentially, staff developers from the Reading and Writing Project work with the district to support the entire literacy curriculum. Teachers and staff developers function almost as co-researchers, observing what students do as readers and writers, developing and pursuing inquiry questions, imagining how students might work independently and in partnerships, studying and developing a discourse about texts, and planning teaching strategies. While professional development can occur in either reading or writing, a district focus to consider would be

writing professional development, noted as an area of weakness in both parent and teacher survey results. Rutgers University Center for Literacy Development and Heinemann are two other professional development providers who offer similar opportunities that could be considered.

- Improve teacher access to outside workshops.

One way to achieve this is to increase the allotted amount of money for these workshops from \$150.00 to \$200.00 per person. Creating a rotating structure that allows classroom teachers to attend outside workshops and conferences within a 3-5 year period would be welcomed. Rutgers University Center for Literacy Development offer workshops in the \$150-\$180.00 range, while courses through Heineman are approximately \$249.00.

- Increase the amount of time dedicated to vertical, cross-curricular and cross-building articulation.

Within district, increasing the amount of vertical articulation and cross district meetings would be easy to implement and welcomed. Allowing for open conversation between schools and grade levels on a regular basis would improve instructional consistency among schools and instruction, and encourage the sharing of ideas. Improving the English language arts offerings in the District Staff College Coursebook is also necessary. Regular teacher surveys requesting course offerings might help improve in district staff offerings. Finally, increasing in-classroom professional development, such as calibrating DRA2 administration and scoring, would provide for hands-on training with our own students.

**Goal #3:** Review K-2 reading and writing assessments to align with literacy best practices and grade-level reading expectations.

**Problem Statement:**

It has been observed that kindergarten students tend to quickly reach the maximum score on the kindergarten PALS assessment and the scoring on DRA2 has some level of subjectivity on the part of the teacher. Further, the writing rubrics are not rigorous enough to determine whether students are meeting grade-level expectations and are not correlated to the New Jersey Learning Standards.

**Supporting Data:**

Based on the parent survey administered during the 2016-17 school year, 85.6% of incoming kindergarteners have had two or more years of preschool experience, therefore coming to school with more reading and writing readiness than prior years. Since students are coming to school with a stronger reading foundation, the PALS assessment may no longer be meeting the needs of our Kindergarten students. Based on the end of year DRA data a larger percentage of the K-2 students are reading at or above grade level. Some of these higher scores could be due to the judgement decisions teachers need

to make when scoring student responses. The DRA2, although research-based, predates the Common Core and New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

The writing rubrics predate the New Jersey Learning Standards and do not reach their expectations. Most students score above grade level expectations and that may not reflect the appropriate level of achievement.

**Proposed Solutions:**

- Investigate literacy assessment tools that align with best-practice, provide objectively consistent results as well as actionable data to drive instruction and placement.

A committee could be established to see in what areas students are outperforming the current PALS assessment and to review alternative assessments. A similar committee could be established to review other available reading assessments and compare them to the DRA2. Another possible solution could be to establish DRA2 refresher teacher trainings to include anchor sessions that may help address possible subjectivity. Currently grades K-2 do not administer a more standardized reading assessments such as the MAP tests used in grades 3-5 reading. This is an area that could be explored in the future.

In the 2017-18 school year the K-2 rubrics will be reviewed and revised to more properly align with the New Jersey Learning Standards. In the coming school years data can be collected from these new rubrics to determine grade level expectations and correlation to standard based assessments in upper grades.

**Goal #4:** Review language and word study instructional methods and materials to ensure alignment with literacy best practices and consistency in program execution.

**Problem Statement:** The current curriculum embeds the word study program into writing workshop. Research recommends a separate, dedicated block of time to focus on word study. Some teachers, in practice, forego word study in favor of writing workshop.

**Supporting Data:**

There is a need for more consistency in how these components are taught in K-2 classrooms. Responses on the teacher survey reflect a wide variety in the frequency and length of vocabulary and word study lessons. Teachers also indicate a much lower level of confidence in teaching vocabulary and word study, as compared to reading and writing, as per the teacher survey.

**Proposed Solutions:**

- Form a committee to investigate word study methods that align with best-practice, provide objectively consistent results as well as actionable data to drive instruction and placement.
- Increase the frequency and consistency of language and word study instruction by creating a separate block of time in the instructional school day.

**Goal #5:** Increase the number of students maintaining or increasing reading levels from the end of the school year to the beginning of the next.

**Problem Statement:**

While most students maintain or increase reading levels from year to year, a percentage of students are experiencing a decrease of one or more reading levels during the same time period.

**Supporting Data:**

When analyzing the data to determine summer slide, on average about 20% of the students in grades K-2 experienced a decrease in one or more reading levels based on assessments at the end of the school year and the beginning of the following school year. As stated above, research from reading experts such as McCombs, Mraz & Rasinski indicates that students can experience a slip in reading achievement over the summer months when reading levels decrease by even one reading level. Such a decrease in reading levels can be a result of the lack of reading instruction as well as a lack of reading in general that occurs over the summer months. Although a large percentage of our students are maintaining or increasing reading levels from school year to school year, it is important to be mindful of those students who are not maintaining such gains. To some students this is a significant loss, especially the struggling readers. However, research does show there are ways to prevent this summer slide: educational summer programs and parental involvement.

**Proposed Solutions:**

- Investigate the feasibility of creating a summer literacy program.

Research shows summer programs are effective in maintaining and even gaining academic achievement (McCombs et al., 2011). McCombs et al. (2011) also show effective summer programs include small class sizes, differentiated instruction, high-quality instruction that is aligned to the rigorous state standards and classroom curriculum, and engaging student and parent participation.

Another possible solution could include a district summer reading incentive. One could be developed by the district classroom teachers and reading specialists to promote more reading over the summer months. Elementary schools could investigate incentive programs already established by publishing companies such as Scholastic or even those used by other comparative districts. A possible revision to summer reading lists that are geared for each student based on level and are available at the town library could alleviate the burden parents feel in finding appropriate reading material for their child. Finally, a possible parent workshop in the spring geared at emphasizing the importance of summer reading and the benefit such action has especially for struggling learners.

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