



**Noblesville Schools
K - 12 English Language Arts Program Review**

Report to the Board of School Trustees

18 June 2019

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**English Language Arts Program Review
Committee Members**

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John McKinney	Teacher	NHS
Annetta Petty	Executive Director of Learning	ESC

English Language Arts Program Review Activities

October 2018	Form committee
November 2018	Overview English Language Arts Program Review Purpose Limitations to reading, literature, and writing (including vocabulary and grammar) Process Timeline Review student performance data (standardized tests) Choose current research in best practices in English Language Arts Read research chapters, articles, position papers Review Indiana Academic Standards and related resources
January 2019	Report on research Analyze research for affirmation of current practices, differences, and questions Identify areas of interest based on student performance, research, experience to guide further evidence gathering Write questions for focus groups Identify focus areas for classroom visits
February 2019	Conduct focus group discussions of teachers, students, parents, and graduates Visit classrooms to observe K - 12 Ela instruction in all ten schools in the district Report key information from focus groups
March - April 2019	Report key information from classroom visits Review evidence from all sources (student performance, research, focus group discussions, observations) Synthesize evidence of strengths and areas for attention Compose findings and recommendations
May 2019	Draft, edit, and finalize committee report
June 2019	Present report to Board of School Trustees

Organization of the Work

Data Review

Groups of committee members examined available data including

- ISTEP+ score reports from 2016 - 2018 to identify strengths and weaknesses in performance on specific skills and knowledge or by certain groups of students.
- ISTEP+ Growth Model Data for 2016 - 2017 to identify growth trends across grade levels or by groups of students.
- AP Instructional Planning Reports 2016 - 2018 for English Language and Composition and English Literature and Composition to note strengths and weaknesses in performance on specific types of questions or content areas.
- SAT and ACT scores to note strengths, weaknesses, and performance compared to Indiana and national averages in writing and critical reading (SAT), and English and reading (ACT).
- NWEA MAP growth scores in Reading: Foundations, Reading: Literature & Nonfiction, Reading: Vocabulary, and Writing (Reading K - 2); and Literature, Nonfiction, and Vocabulary (Reading 2 - 5).

Preliminary areas of interest were listed as a result of this examination, and informed subsequent reading, discussions, and observations.

Review of the Research

Members selected paired articles, chapters, or position papers on a wide range of topics including writing instruction, comprehension, assessment, vocabulary, grammar, global literacy, and 21st century curriculum. They entered key points into a shared document, and all members read all key points to gain familiarity with current thinking on effective learning and teaching of all aspects of English Language Arts. Members noted areas in which research supported current practices, areas in which current practices differ from what the research said, and questions about either the research or current practices that were prompted by their reading. Key points from the research, as well as questions prompted by it, joined information about student performance to provide a basis for further evidence gathering through group discussions and classroom observations.

Focus Group Discussions

Thirty-one educators from all grades and various subjects, as well as media specialists and instructional coaches, agreed to participate in three separate group discussions. Similarly, twelve current students, three NHS graduates, and twelve parents accepted invitations to meet in three groups on the next evening. Committee members served as facilitators and notetakers for these groups, which shared opinions about students' strengths and weaknesses in English Language Arts, best and worst experiences, and the use of certain strategies for instruction and assessment, among other topics. Ideas and topics that were repeated in focus group discussions were noted and considered along with other evidence about effective learning and teaching in the areas encompassed by English Language Arts.

Classroom Learning Walks

Drawing from areas of interest suggested by student data, research, and committee members' experiences as educators and parents, an organizer was created for classroom observations. This organizer focused observers' attention on reading and writing workshop, effective reading and

writing instruction, practices that may discourage reading and writing, and the balance and integration of reading and writing. Twenty-two committee members visited eighty-three classes. Ideas and topics that were repeated in members' discussions of what they observed in classrooms were identified and synthesized with other evidence of practices that should be maintained, and areas to investigate and improve.

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Evidence from Program Review Investigations

Key Points from Student Performance Data

Topic	Key Point
NWEA Map Growth K-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students performed lower in writing K-2. • Growth was average overall.

ISTEP 6-point writing rubric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing scores declined in grades 4-7 from 2016- 2018. • 8th-grade students have stayed the same with no growth in writing with 57% of students passing from 2016-2018. Overall as a district, our highest passing rate is 59% in 2016 with this score being accomplished by 7th-grade students.
NWEA & ISTEP+ Median Growth Percentile Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth data is very comparable from 1st through 8th grade. • The range is 50-64 percentile growth over last two years. • Both ISTEP+ and NWEA show similar growth data, suggesting no glaring curricular gaps or deficits exist. • The growth data range for subgroups is greater. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ SPED growth data range is from 23rd to 64th percentile, with the highest overall growth data in 7th and 8th grade. ◦ EL growth data range is from 24 to 74, with the highest overall growth data in grades 5-8; more significant differences exist between ISTEP+ and NWEA growth data. • Overall, NS has shown an increase in median growth percentile over the last 7 years.

Key Points from Research

Topic	Key Point
Curriculum/ Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students need time to read, write, think, and discuss. Curriculum should be designed considering this need and the need for variety in texts, genres, assessments, etc. • By utilizing clear writing instruction and mentor texts/models, students should have greater choice in their writing. • Reading and writing can be used to emphasize different skills and patterns of thinking, making curriculum more applicable outside of the content area. • Creating opportunities for students to write for real audiences rather than the teacher and other students is beneficial to student engagement and skill development. • Utilizing class time to teach all students something they need; conferring with individual students; and giving students time to work, share, and collaborate improve students' skill development. • Vocabulary development is essential for reading and writing development. • Students must be taught <i>how</i> to read and write, not <i>what</i> to read and write in a writer's workshop model. Content can extend to serve all students well. • Grammar is best taught in context.

Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback should focus on strengths as well as guide students toward individual needs during the creation process. • Grammar is best taught in context of other writings, often as part of feedback. • Writing should be social, with multiple opportunities for students to talk about their writing. • Students should have multiple low-risk writing opportunities that generate teacher or peer response/feedback. • Assessment and feedback must be an ongoing process.
Technology/ Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students need opportunities to choose among available technology for the best tool to meet their needs: to collaborate, produce, and share information. • Teachers of reading and writing need to utilize technology in ways that match real-world technology use.

Key Points from Focus Group Discussions

Topic	Key Point
ELA Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall frustration exists with the lack of continuity, structure, and guidance when it comes to grammar standards. • Literature is being taught well K-12, but writing instruction (organization, structure, voice, conventions, stamina, etc.) is lacking overall, with particular concern for writing programs in grades 6-8. • A workshop model is utilized in elementary schools and in many middle school language arts classrooms. • The middle schools lack a common reading and writing curriculum. • A question exists regarding what's most important: creating a love of reading and writing, or higher tests scores? Can both coexist? • A concern exists regarding stamina and focus because of iPad use for reading and writing. • Transfer of a skill is weak days or weeks after the lesson, both within Ela and transferred to other classes.
Student Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students have much choice in elementary, lots of choice in middle school, and very little choice in high school. Engagement suffers because of this trend.
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents were impressed with the level of feedback that their students are receiving on writing assignments specifically at the high school. Parents were pleased with 1:1 feedback conferencing at other levels.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students do not take advantage of revision opportunities or see the benefits of revising their work: they are focused on just getting assignments completed and moving on. • Feedback was valued by parents, but they were concerned about students valuing the feedback.
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents felt that elementary and middle school teachers did an awesome job of building relationships with students, and affected students' confidence and success with reading.

Key Points from Learning Walks

Topic	Key Point
ELA Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The curriculum needs to be aligned with state standards K - 12, ensuring increases in depth and rigor at each grade level. • Instruction in vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, and conventions must occur K-12, and this knowledge must transfer to all subject areas.
Reading/Writing Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development is needed for implementing the Writing Workshop, with an emphasis on vocabulary development, effective and timely feedback, and revision of written work.
Student Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students need more choice in reading texts and assignments in grades K-12.
Reading Time and Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time must be provided for all students to read in grades K-12. • Student accountability and depth of understanding/thinking need to be addressed in the Reading Workshop.

Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations: Practices to Maintain	Recommendations: Areas to Investigate and/or Improve
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and writing workshop structures are widely used in K - 5 and increasing in 6 - 8. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ mini-lessons ○ read alouds ○ conferences ○ whole-group instruction ○ independent work • Students receive feedback from many teachers on their performance in both reading and writing. • Anchor charts to support reading and writing are posted in many classrooms. • Writing models from various sources are frequently used in instruction by many teachers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ students ○ teachers ○ ISTEP resources ○ texts • Students often choose what they read in grades K - 5 and, increasingly, in 6 - 8 (from thematic lists). • Elementary Units of Study and secondary units based on Understanding by Design are in evident use. • Technology tools, including iPads, support instruction especially through ready access to text, choice in how to learn (read, take notes), and organization of course materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve alignment with state standards K - 12. • Improve articulation of writing instruction and student experiences K - 12. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ modes ○ expectations • Improve students' transfer of Ela skills to other subjects and grades. • Provide professional development in effective writing instruction. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ feedback ○ use of models ○ integration and balance with reading instruction ○ writing workshop ○ authenticity (purpose, audience, topic) and choice (topic, format) ○ modes and formats ○ developing voice and tone ○ developing writing stamina ○ conventions and vocabulary in context • Provide professional development in effective implementation of reading workshop. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ensuring student accountability ○ developing depth of understanding • Determine and address causes of decline as students age. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ standardized test scores ○ student engagement ○ choice and time for reading • Determine and address causes of lower performance on standardized tests by subgroups of students.