

## The Four E's Checklist: Creating and Sustaining a Strong Culture of Literacy at Your School

In each category, mark each item on the checklist using the following code:

- ☆ This is strongly in place at our school.
- ✓ This is somewhat in place but could be improved.
- This is an area where we need to focus.

### 1. Environment

Environment refers to the structural, climatic, cultural, and physical conditions for teaching and learning within which a focus on literacy across the content areas is taking place. Environment has a forceful and often overlooked impact on the willingness or reluctance of individuals to participate in new initiatives.

#### Checklist:

- Our school is a safe place for teachers to try out new approaches.
  
- When you walk into our school, it is easy to tell that literacy is a focus.
  
- Teachers are used to doing peer observations, team teaching, and/or peer coaching, and there is a structure to support this in our school.
  
- Teacher talk is often focused on instruction and student learning.
  
- The school's mission/vision is taken seriously by all staff, and within that mission/vision is an explicit connection to literacy.

#### Ways to ignite a passion for literacy through Environment:

- Share teachers' success with strategies at faculty meetings, descriptors in teachers' mailbox, or "strategy of the month" email.
- Place content area strategy resources in department offices, library, or teacher's room
- Hang posters for recommended reading and motivational messages about reading, writing, speaking, and thinking.
- Publicize key messages related to the literacy initiative at the school in principal's newsletters, school Web site, and school newspaper.
- Display students' literacy products in classrooms and hallways.
- Announce literacy-related school and community events and successes on the school PA system, Web site, and bulletin board displays.
- Display photos of students participating in literacy activities.
- Post a chart where teachers can list times for classroom strategy use for other teachers to observe during planning periods or with substitute coverage.
- Establish community-wide, school-wide, or grade level "shared reads."
- Develop vocabulary interest through school-wide "words of the week," content area word walls, word contests/puzzles, and visual depictions of words.
- Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## 2. Engagement

Engagement refers to the direct connection between the individual and the task at hand. In the case of content area teachers, engagement relates to how literacy needs to be seen as central or vital to their interests or goals as teachers.

### Checklist:

- Teachers across the content areas see literacy development as central to their job, and they take responsibility for improving their abilities in this area.
- Teachers across the content areas understand how literacy relates to content area learning, and they feel they have many strategies to assist struggling readers and writers.
- Teachers believe that helping students become independent learners is a central part of their role as a teacher.
- Teachers understand that their content area has challenging reading, writing, and presentation requirements, and they help students meet content literacy demands.
- Students generally feel competent and are willing to complete content area reading and writing tasks. Teachers are not frustrated by students' lack of skills and/or resistance to reading and writing.
- Students use multiple strategies to learn from challenging texts and are largely independent learners. Teachers do not feel they are working harder than the students.
- Teachers understand that use of literacy strategies will enable more students to learn and retain more content over the course of the year. Teachers do not feel they must make a trade-off between teaching literacy skills and teaching content.
- Students are given multiple opportunities weekly across the content areas to use reading and writing to learn.

### Ways to ignite a passion for literacy through Engagement:

- Create opportunities for teachers to analyze the content area literacy demands of their curriculum materials (textbooks, other texts, Web sites) and the state test.
  - Provide opportunities for teachers to explain how the time invested in teaching students how to use literacy strategies pays off when students learn more independently.
  - Provide peer planning/coaching/modeling on how to infuse strategy use into lessons.
  - Have departments meet regularly with the librarian/media specialist to locate parallel resources to support upcoming units of study.
  - Ask teachers to read portions of very difficult text and discuss how they made sense of the text. List all of the strategies used.
  - Have teachers examine college-level texts in their content areas and technical manuals so they are cognizant of college and workplace literacy demands.
  - Create opportunities for teachers to collaboratively examine student work and share what literacy strategies might be helpful in addressing identified literacy/learning issues.
- Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Expectations

Expectations refer to what an individual will be held accountable for. While expectations can be either internal or external, in this case they are what department, or grade level, team colleagues, the principal, or the district expects of teachers vis-à-vis integration of literacy support and development into content area learning.

#### Checklist:

- There are clear expectations that teachers are to use specified literacy strategies.
- Administrators hold teachers accountable for the frequent use of literacy strategies in content area teaching and learning.
- Course descriptions include literacy expectations.
- Classes in all content areas are well supported with a variety of teaching texts.
- All core content area teachers, special education teachers, and teachers of other content areas are required to participate in content area literacy teacher professional development.
- Students are assessed in reading at the beginning and end of the year, or the beginning of each year, and the results are reported back to the faculty.
- Expectations focus on the transfer of strategy use to students, so they can use literacy support strategies independently to comprehend and respond to appropriately complex text.

#### Ways to ignite a passion for literacy through Expectations

- Ask teachers to have a literacy goal as part of their professional growth plan.
- Have administrators and the literacy coach do literacy walk-throughs on a biweekly or monthly basis
- Build expectations for literacy strategy use into classroom observation instruments.
- Have administrators “catch” teachers using literacy support strategies and provide a quick feedback card when they see this occurring.
- Collect and use data to inform faculty about student reading levels and set expectations for teachers to respond by (1) making difficult texts more accessible through the use of strategies, (2) providing a wide variety of content area texts to support learning, and (3) increasing the amount of reading/writing instruction and time for reading and writing.
- Revise course descriptions to provide a clear understanding of the literacy habits and skills that will be developed in each course.
- Establish a process for making course, grade level, departmental, or team agreements about the use of specific literacy support strategies.
- Have teachers adopt common writing/research/project/speaking rubrics that contain specific literacy expectations and are used within and across content areas.
- Incorporate literacy support strategies into the teacher evaluation process.
- Other: ideas: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Encouragement

Encouragement and support refers to what is often necessary to help individuals feel comfortable enough to try new things and be willing to persevere when initial attempts are unsuccessful or more challenging than anticipated.

##### Checklist:

- Teachers feel comfortable asking for help from colleagues and/or the literacy coach to improve their skills in supporting content area literacy development.
  
- Teachers have a variety of ways available to them to improve their skills in supporting content area literacy development.
  
- Teachers feel they have and can obtain needed support materials.
  
- There are scheduled times for teachers to meet and discuss the successes and challenges of strategy implementation. Teachers feel that everyone is on a journey of improving their skills in this area and that it is okay to be at a beginning point.
  
- There are resources, programs, and structures in place at the school to address the needs of struggling readers and writers. Teachers know what these are and show students how to access them.

##### Ways to ignite a passion for literacy through Encouragement

- Provide a menu of teacher professional options focused on literacy strategies, as well as content area applications, that are offered and supported by the school. Teachers can choose options that fit their learning styles and schedules.
- Plan ways for colleagues and/or a literacy coach to co-plan with, model a strategy in classrooms, and/or coach in the use of strategies. Peer coaching is encouraged, and structures are in place (i.e., substitute teacher coverage) to support peer learning.
- Review resources present in the school and/or readily available to support further learning and plan how to purchase other resources that are needed to support literacy.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to share “lessons learned” about unsuccessful attempts at using strategies that provide support and feedback.

Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_  
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