

Striving Readers Grant: Year 2 Executive Summary

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Initiative addresses the literacy concerns among all children, especially those living in poverty, English learners, children with disabilities, and others at risk for academic failure. MSDE recognizes that students begin literacy learning well before entering school, and that partnerships between MSDE, local school systems, families, and community partners is critical for the success of students across the state. Effective literacy leadership; quality professional learning; standards-aligned instruction from birth to secondary school; comprehensive assessments; and tiered systems of instruction and intervention are essential for providing students the coherence and support they need to develop effective literacy skills.

MSDE continued its programming through the Striving Readers Comprehensive Initiative through Year 2. Two SRCL grant specialists were hired and began supporting local school systems in their implementation of the SRCL grant. Quarterly briefings were held for all SRCL sub-grantees, as well as in-person monitoring and support visits and ongoing technical assistance to all 24 subgrantees.

MSDE also revised its Comprehensive Literacy Plan in summer 2019. In addition to the five keys previously identified for increased literacy achievement for all students, Maryland added a sixth key: Family and Community Partnerships. The addition of the sixth key reflects Maryland's ongoing commitment to increasing literacy achievement for all students through strengthening partnerships between families, community organizations, and local school systems.

Key: Instructional Leadership:

To develop instructional leaders able to identify and encourage teacher leaders; provide opportunities for regular literacy meetings, data dialogues, and joint planning; and monitoring and assessing progress.

Specific Performance Measure #1: Increased participation in professional learning opportunities in literacy targeted to school based instructional leaders.

During Year 2, substantial progress was made toward this performance measure. Professional learning was offered to school-based administrators and district personnel targeting effective, evidence-based literacy practices. Several districts began offering systemic professional learning for school-based leaders at regular principals' meetings, with one large district even offering a formal course on evidence-based literacy practices during monthly meetings. Most districts offered professional learning on unpacking the Maryland College- and Career- Ready Standards and corresponding instructional practices to school-based leaders, supervisors, deans, specialists, literacy coaches, and teacher leaders. Many districts continue to employ literacy coaches as part of their grant implementation; these districts offered professional learning to their literacy coaches in an effort to strengthen their literacy pedagogy and provide support in adult learning theory. Districts have also continued to utilize administrators, specialists, coaches, and lead teachers to lead data analysis meetings and collaborative planning sessions. In addition to this work at the school level, some districts have hired instructional

coaches and community liaisons to collaborate with the early childhood community. Coaches and liaisons have been offered instructional support to childcare partners and strengthened community partnerships at early childhood advisory councils. In an effort to further strengthen coaching models and districts' capacity for literacy coaching, MSDE held a work day for literacy coaches, school-based leaders, and central office literacy staff. In Year 3, MSDE plans to hold a regional series of workshops for literacy coaches to further strengthen their skills.

Although great progress has been made, some local school systems are still working towards incorporating school-based leaders in professional learning on evidence-based literacy practices. For many district leaders, this represents new learning, and local school systems are working to provide them with the professional learning needed for effective instructional leadership. Some local school systems are also challenged with developing or strengthening partnerships with community-based childcare providers.

Key: Strategic Professional Learning:

Together state and local teams will establish and disseminate needs-based professional learning in a variety of mediums to local educational agencies, K-12 educators, Birth to 5 programs, and local communities.

Specific Performance Measure #2: Increased participation in professional learning opportunities targeted to Early Childhood providers and teachers PreK-12 that is based on a need's assessment.

There was significant progress on this measure in Year 2, both at the state and district level. At the state level, MSDE offered a series of regional professional learning opportunities for teachers, principals, supervisors, and childcare providers from July 1 to August 30, 2019. MSDE offered a state-wide regional professional learning workshop for early childhood teachers and childcare providers: "Building Early Literacy through Expressive Arts." A second regional workshop was offered to elementary teachers and school leaders, "Language: The Key to Literacy." Additional workshops on evidence-based practices in early literacy were available for elementary teachers and administrators. To meet the needs of adolescent learners, MSDE continued its partnership with WestEd to offer adolescent literacy regional workshops, including three-day workshops, "Reading Apprenticeship," on interdisciplinary literacy; two-day workshops on "Leading for Literacy;" and four-day workshops on "Quality Teaching for English Learners."

Several local school systems collaborated with early childhood advisory councils, community partners, and district leaders to offer professional learning on evidence-based practices for childcare providers and early childhood teachers. Some districts continued to offer professional learning through the use of Raising a Reader, Ready Rosie, and other programs to increase home literacy practices, while other districts collaborated with local libraries and other organizations to offer parent workshops on home literacy practices. Several districts have also hired early childhood literacy coaches to provide instructional support to early childhood teachers, both in school-based and childcare settings. Although the birth-5 portion of the grant represents a new initiative for many local school systems, most have addressed the challenge through leveraging community partnerships and district leadership to provide ongoing

professional learning for early childhood teachers and childcare providers. Some local school systems continue to need support with providing and incentivizing professional learning for community-based childcare providers. MSDE plans to offer continued technical assistance with this issue in Year 3.

Additionally, local school systems offered an array of quality professional learning for teachers. This included professional learning on effective small group instruction, evidence-based ELA curriculum, effective writing practices, and workshops on systematic, explicit instruction of foundational reading skills. Local school systems also continued to offer professional learning on evidence-based intervention programs, such as READ 180/System 44, Orton Gillingham, Wilson Reading, LLI, etc. While professional learning has been at the forefront of grant activities and implementation, many local school systems need continued support in evaluating the impact of professional learning. MSDE offered a workshop on this topic at their spring SRCL briefing and will continue to provide local school systems with technical assistance, feedback, and targeted support as they work to effectively evaluate their professional learning activities.

Key: Comprehensive System of Assessments:

A comprehensive system of assessments includes state, local, school, and teacher assessment data. This data is analyzed in collaborative teams to guide and refine evidence-based instruction and allow for strategic data-informed decision making to meet the needs of the individual student.

Specific Performance Measure #3: Increased participation in school based data-informed decision making activities.

Continued progress was made towards this goal in Year 2. In nearly all districts, district supervisor, instructional leaders, literacy coaches, and teachers work together to regularly analyze assessment data and to plan instruction based on data. School-based leaders and district personnel also collaborate to offer systemic professional learning based on PARCC data. Some districts have identified or hired specialists specifically to analyze instructional data and to provide coaching and support for instructional leaders on using data effectively and facilitating data discussions.

Additionally, Year 2 represented the first time that most districts have administered an oral language assessment and collected and reported data on oral language. Maryland does not have a state-wide assessment to measure 4-year old oral language data. Therefore, local school systems, with guidance from MSDE, chose their own oral language assessment for this GPRA measure. A challenge has been developing a means of collecting and reporting data gathered with multiple oral language assistance. MSDE has provided significant support and technical assistance in oral language assessment, data collection, and reporting. However, some local school systems still struggled to administer and collect data using the methods designated by MSDE. For Year 3, targeted technical assistance and greater support will be offered to local school systems needing the additional assistance. MSDE will also work internally to refine its data collection tool and protocol.

Key: Tiered Instruction and Interventions:

Maryland has adopted regulations for the inclusion of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in all classrooms. The state's tiered system of support will continue to be refined and include all children and will provide enrichment and intervention models to achieve comprehensive literacy for all.

Specific Performance Measure #4: Increased use of instructional materials and interventions supported by strong and moderate evidence.

Prior to the adoption for the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Initiative, MSDE provided professional learning on identifying and evaluating instructional programs and materials according to ESSA evidence levels. Following this professional learning, districts used this information to formulate literacy plans and began implementing these programs in SRCL Year 1, including READ 180/ System 44, Bookworms, Wilson Reading, Orton Gillingham, Achieve 3000, etc. In Year 2, local school systems continued to evaluate their curriculum and intervention offerings, with some making changes to the purchase or implementation of instructional materials. The challenge in Year 2 has been implementation of these programs with fidelity. To address that challenge, many districts have hired intervention coordinators or specialists to support school-based leaders and teachers in implementing interventions with fidelity. They have also offered professional learning and ongoing coaching and support to teachers who are implementing intervention programs.

Now that local school systems have selected programs that are supported by strong or moderate evidence, MSDE will continue to provide technical assistance and support around implementing these programs with fidelity. This includes ensuring that students are appropriately placed in interventions. Several local school systems are working to develop clear intervention plans that provide guidance to school-based leaders on which student needs are best served with the intervention programs offered. MSDE will offer professional learning at the state level to district leaders undertaking this work, as well as support to districts as they collect data to evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions.

MSDE has also provided local school systems with professional learning on the continuous improvement process. Following the SRCL Convening in February 2019, we contracted with Brett Lane, founder and CEO of the Institute for Strategic Leadership and Learning, to provide workshops for leaders in our local school systems. Mr. Lane presented on the continuous improvement process at our spring briefing and walked participants through identifying the conditions and structures needed for continuous improvement. He also presented at our annual Statewide Federal Programs Conference, which was attended by instructional leaders from throughout the state of Maryland. Internally, MSDE has adopted the continuous improvement process for state-level activities and implements it consistently utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data for evaluation and reflection.

Maryland's Comprehensive Literacy Plan is updated annually. It was most recently updated in June 2019. This process was directed by our Coordinator of English/ Language Arts

and done in collaboration with other members of the Division of Curriculum, Instructional Improvement, and Professional Learning. In reviewing this document, MSDE evaluated its current goals and initiatives, which the Comprehensive Literacy Plan addresses as keys to literacy. MSDE believes that the identified keys are the most essential practices for raising the level of literacy achievement for all students statewide. However, MSDE also examined the feedback gathered from our briefings, surveys, SRCL grant monitoring visits, and technical assistance. This data indicated a clear need for a sixth key to the Comprehensive Literacy Plan: Family and Community Partnerships. In adding this goal, we collaborated with Title I and the Division of Early Childhood to formulate a narrative and state activities that would be most impactful on students' literacy outcomes. In Year 3, MSDE will distribute the Comprehensive Literacy Plan to its identified stakeholder workgroup for comments, feedback, and additional revisions.

Maryland was a recipient of Supplemental Funds in Year 2. All of the allocated Supplemental Funds were allocated to local school systems based upon needs, to use for implementation of their SRCL grant initiatives, as indicated by the budget narrative. The use of those funds have been tracked and monitored by the SRCL grant specialists.