

(7/10/24 District Administrator's Corner Article)

In July of 2023, our Wisconsin State Legislature passed Assembly Bill 321 which included Act 20. Act 20, for us in the world of education, has created a great deal of discussion, and will change the way Wisconsin schools regulate and facilitate early literacy instruction. (Incidentally, it has also created a year long argument at the capitol.)

This was not a little decision. The legislation made various sweeping changes to early literacy instruction, curriculum, assessments, and interventions, as well as having many implications to teacher licensing and preparation.

Act 20 required the creation of an Office of Literacy, known as the "Wisconsin Reading Center," within the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to carry out responsibilities relating to early literacy outcomes. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction has recently hired a director for the office, Barb Novak, who will work closely in consultation with a Council on Early Literacy Curricula, a group also recently formed to carefully facilitate changes. It will be a big job.

All Wisconsin schools are required to provide science-based early literacy instruction in both classroom and intervention settings and train every teacher in grades kindergarten through grade 3 to these newly articulated standards. Science-based early literacy instruction is defined as instruction that is systematic and explicit and consists of all the following:

- Phonological awareness
- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Building background knowledge
- Oral language development
- Vocabulary building
- Instruction in writing
- Instruction in comprehension
- Reading fluency

To accomplish and support the changes, the Department of Public Instruction will also be monitoring new elements listed here:

- Reading curriculum grants and suggestions of products to choose
- A literacy coaching component for districts
- A new required reading assessment with clear timelines of use
- A new required reading screener with clear timelines of use
- Required documentation of interventions for students - "A Reading Plan"
- Changes to teacher licensure

When politicians start demanding sweeping changes to our work, educators get leery...but we have to learn and reflect with an open mind. Having an added emphasis on early literacy can only help children that need this fundamental skill. River Valley has knowledgeable instructors that have studied the review of literacy instruction and worked hard to start our changes. We will continue to grow.

As Wisconsin jumps to transform early literacy education, I am hoping for a sense of optimism as we improve literacy outcomes for all students. By working together, we can create a future

where every child in River Valley and beyond has the opportunity to become a prolific reader and achieve academic success.

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