



Maine's Comprehensive State Literacy Plan

The Big Picture

More than in any other age, today's world demands highly developed literacy skills. For that reason, Maine needs a coordinated approach to cultivating high levels of literacy among its citizens, birth through adult. That is the objective of *Literacy for ME: Maine's Comprehensive State Literacy Plan*.

The Maine Department of Education (Maine DOE) is committed to ensuring that Maine's children are ready for post-secondary education, careers, and civic life by the time they graduate from high school. Helping all Maine residents develop strong literacy skills is a crucial part of that mission, and one that transcends schools and includes everyone in our communities. *Literacy for ME: Maine's Comprehensive State Literacy Plan* offers a roadmap for local communities to bolster their literacy infrastructure with the help of state-level activities that support those efforts.

Through *Literacy for ME*:

- Children and adults will have access to more of the help they need to meet the literacy demands of post-secondary education, careers, and civic life;
- Maine communities will have access to a statewide system of support for evidence-based literacy learning practices across the birth to adult span;
- State-level literacy education efforts will be informed by practices proven effective in local communities;
- Local learning communities will have access to guidance for developing and implementing comprehensive local literacy plans; and
- Cross-agency collaborations will strengthen literacy across the birth to adult span.

Literacy: Lifelong Learning and Lifetime Success

We know this to be true: Maine's students need to leave high school equipped to become lifelong learners, regardless of their plans following graduation. This is not an option; it is a demand today's world makes of all its citizens if they are to succeed. Key to the ability to be a lifelong learner is literacy. More than simply being able to read and write, literacy is the ability to communicate meaningfully in a variety of ways for multiple purposes. While this includes reading and writing, it also encompasses speaking, listening, and viewing.

Success in any avenue of life hinges on good decision-making. This is no less true in today's tech-heavy society, where making informed decisions rides on the ability to read and glean meaning from a broad range of complex texts distributed through an ever-widening variety of technologies. As the wealth of available information grows, Maine's citizens need to be able to evaluate information for credibility, determining which sources are trustworthy and which are not.

Furthermore, Maine's citizens need to be able to communicate effectively. Thoughts, ideas, opinions and information must be conveyed accurately and understandably, be it to a colleague in the next office or to eyes and ears on the other side of the globe.

The lack of these basic literacy skills can prove catastrophic for an individual's financial security and career outlook. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL, 2003) found that adults with low levels of literacy are less likely than others to have steady employment, and their earnings are usually significantly less than those of more literate adults. Adults with limited literacy skills are also more likely to live in poverty and receive government assistance (NAAL, 2003).

But the impact isn't only economic. Low literacy levels have implications for civic and cultural life as well. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy found that adults with low levels of literacy were less likely to vote in local, state and national elections than were more literate citizens (NAAL, 2003). It would be no exaggeration, therefore, to suggest that the health of our democracy is tied to the literacy of its citizens.

Research also shows that 85% of brain development occurs by age three and that a child's level of language and early literacy skill development in the first five years of life are indicative of future success in school and the workforce. Indeed, children's oral language skills at the time they enter kindergarten predict their later literacy skills and school success (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Duncan et al., 2007; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), and students who start behind tend to stay behind (Stanovich, 1986).

Students not reading proficiently by the end of the third grade are less likely than their peers to earn a high school diploma (Hernandez, 2011). Even if those students graduate from high school and enroll in college, they are more likely to require remedial courses to catch them up, diminishing their likelihood of earning a post-secondary degree. When they enter the workforce, their employers are more likely to have to spend precious training resources to bolster their reading and writing skills.

The proven importance of providing children with a solid literacy foundation early in life, and the far-reaching impact those skills have on an individual's academic and workplace careers, makes it imperative that Maine take a coordinated and comprehensive approach to literacy.

Maine's Comprehensive State Literacy Plan

Literacy for ME addresses ongoing efforts at both the state and local levels, regardless of the funding source or responsible government agency, and orients them toward the same goal: literacy for success in the 21st century. In addition, *Literacy for ME* sets out a vision for unifying these approaches, with the clear goal of equipping all of Maine's citizens with the literacy skills they need to succeed in college, careers, and civic life.

Literacy for ME is organized around six critical components:

- Strong leadership
- System-wide commitment and partnerships
- Standards and curriculum
- Instruction and intervention
- Assessment
- Professional learning

Using the components listed above, *Literacy for ME* outlines steps and identifies resources to help educators, parents, and others provide children with a strong early childhood foundation in literacy, provide students with effective literacy teaching throughout their years in school, and extend adult literacy to even higher levels.

Literacy for ME details strategies for supporting and encouraging strong leadership. Embedded in the plan are suggested methods for developing partnerships among the various agencies, organizations, and businesses that interact with our children and families. At the same time, the plan addresses what may already be taking place within our schools with regard to curriculum development, clear learning targets for developing literacy skills, and methods for assuring continuous growth of all literacy learners. No less important, *Literacy for ME* also stresses the need to support the continued learning of all professionals relative to literacy development as technology and work transform our perception of literacy.

Separate from the plan itself, *Literacy for ME* also includes a toolkit that provides many of the resources needed to implement the plan. This collection of digital tools, hosted online by the Maine Department of Education and free to all who wish to use it, will continue to grow as needs are identified and solutions developed.

Teaching literacy is not the domain of a single class, a single subject area, or even the 13 years a student spends in public school. It involves the determined efforts of many individuals and organizations, starting with the parents, grandparents, older siblings, and caregivers who engage in rich conversations and spark a love of books. Outside of the home, literacy is the domain of the pediatrician who encourages new parents to read to their children, early

educators who provide intentional learning environments that support early language and literacy instruction and promote a culture of inquiry, and the community library where children learn that reading can open up a world of possibilities. It is also the K-12 educators who teach students not only to read literature and write about it, but to navigate and make sense of today's diverse media landscape and rapidly expanding body of information. Acquiring literacy skills does not end with the completion of high school; it is a process in which the student continues to be involved right into adulthood, from the community education classes that teach new immigrants to master the English language, to adult education programs that encourage parents to plant the seeds of literacy in their children.

Helping all Maine residents develop strong literacy skills is a task that transcends schools and includes everyone in our communities – a reality addressed by this plan. For Maine to prosper culturally and economically, *Literacy for ME* must be a priority.