

English Language Arts Curriculum Project Alignment to the *Michigan Curriculum Framework*

English Language Arts Vision

On August 5, 2002, the English Language Arts (ELA) Curriculum Project commenced with an initial activity that was critical to the work of the ELA curriculum development team – to generate and achieve consensus about a vision for English Language Arts. The vision and belief statements became a philosophical blueprint for building the curriculum. During the project, the team frequently measured decisions about curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development against this inclusive image of a successful ELA program:

An effective English language arts (ELA) program will equip students with the tools to successfully navigate their world. Within each language arts classroom, students will:

- *Use reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visualization to skillfully communicate and construct meaning.*
- *Explore universal themes, issues, and ideas.*
- *Connect the learning to real life, fostering lifelong, and proficient use of the language arts.*
- *Identify standards to evaluate quality in oral, written, and visual text.*

There are many similarities between the BAISD vision statement and the ELA Vision Statement in the *Michigan Curriculum Framework (MCF)*, which begins as follows:

The English language arts are the vehicles of communication by which we live, work, share, and build ideas and understandings of the present, reflect on the past, and imagine the future. Through the English language arts, we learn to appreciate, integrate, and apply what is learned for real purposes in our homes, schools, communities, and workplaces...The ultimate goal for all English language arts learners is personal, social, occupational, and civic literacy.

Both vision statements express the philosophical underpinnings and assumptions about the discipline. They are alike in several other ways:

- Both reflect real-world literacy needs in the home, school, community, and workplace, and the connection of ELA learning to adult life roles.
- Both reflect an integrated view of ELA – the construction of meaning through listening, reading, and viewing, and the communication of meaning through speaking, writing, and visualization. The language arts are not taught as separate modes, but as mutually enhancing processes.
- Both vision statements encompass process and content – **how** people communicate as well as **what** they communicate.
 - **Process** includes skills and strategies used in listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing.

- **Content** includes the themes, concepts, social issues, and conflicts found in classical and contemporary literature and non-literary texts, such as technical writing, informational articles, interviews, speeches, signs, and advertisements.
- Both visions emphasize development of lifelong appreciation for language, literacy, and learning.

Overview of English Language Arts Content Standards, and Benchmarks

In 1993, the University of Michigan and the Michigan Department of Education were awarded a federal grant to co-develop a state English Language Arts curriculum framework. Between 1993 and 1996, a large cadre of state ELA leaders created a framework consisting of a vision, curriculum content standards, and benchmarks. Statewide field reviews were conducted, revisions were completed, and the content standards were approved by the State Board of Education in July, 1996.

The twelve English Language Arts Content Standards, common to all grades, are broad curriculum statements that describe what students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate from high school. Following each of the twelve content standards are 3-8 benchmarks that describe the knowledge and skills students must master in order to achieve particular content standards. The benchmarks are not written at individual grade levels, but for grade-level clusters (early elementary, later elementary, middle school, and high school).

In the past seven years, school districts across the state have worked to align their local language arts curricula to state content standards and benchmarks. In most cases, this effort is initiated with the process of converting the state grade-level cluster benchmarks into individual K-12 grade-level expectations. Following the adoption of a guiding vision and the articulation of beliefs about ELA, the BAISD ELA curriculum development team developed grade-by-grade benchmarks.

Alignment between State Content Standards/Benchmarks and BAISD Grade-Level Benchmarks

Closely aligned with the state ELA curriculum framework, the BAISD ELA Curriculum identifies specific content at each grade level, yet it has been customized to meet the needs of the teachers and students throughout the county. While the state framework divides ELA into twelve large sections based on the twelve content standards, the BAISD project collapses the standards into three comprehensive “strands,” composed of standards and benchmarks which complement each other in an unforced and natural way. Together, the three strands, which integrate all six of the language arts (listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing) capture the essence of the curriculum content and provide clear focal points for language arts teaching and learning. Additionally, the strand divisions reduce the enormity of the curriculum allowing it to be packaged in a document of manageable size.

English Language Arts Strands

The three strands are (1) **Genre, Literature, and Understanding**; (2) **Skills, Strategies, and Processes**; and (3) **Language Conventions, Voice, and Communication**. They comprise the WHAT/WHY, HOW, and HOW WELL of ELA. (*Following a brief description of the content of each strand, the three strands and the benchmarks contained therein are listed and summarized.*)

Strand 1. Genre, Literature, and Understanding

The content standards and benchmarks in Strand 1 define the **WHAT** and **WHY**, or the foundation of the curriculum. The strand is composed of four state content standards and 13 benchmarks dealing with elements of narrative and expository genre; literature, universal themes, and using literature to take authentic action in the world. In generating grade-level benchmarks for Strand 1, teachers determined grade-appropriate themes and real-world issues, and they selected classic and contemporary literature reflective of different perspectives about those big ideas.

Strand 2. Skills, Strategies, and Processes

Consisting of three state content standards and 13 benchmarks, this strand contains the **HOW** – the literacy processes, skills, and strategies needed to understand the **WHAT** and **WHY**. Methods for using metacognitive strategies to construct and communicate meaning, as well as research and inquiry skills, including technology, are an important focus in this cluster. Fostering the development of personal standards and the use of academic standards to evaluate the quality communication is also emphasized.

Strand 3. Language Conventions, Voice, and Communication

The final strand, answers the question, **HOW WELL**, and contributes quality, dimension, and enhancement to the knowledge and skills of the first two strands. Fluency in reading, writing, and speaking; facility with language and vocabulary; elements of effective communication; and the craft of speakers, writers, and illustrators are the areas of study in Strand 3.

Early in the project, close scrutiny by project leaders revealed that much of the content (knowledge and skills) of the remaining state content standards and benchmarks had been addressed previously in Strand 1 and 2 benchmarks. In an effort to provide clear and unambiguous targets for the curriculum writing teams, the project facilitators reduced the number of Strand 3 benchmarks from 29 to 14. This act eliminated redundancy inherent within the state benchmarks while actually enhancing the quality and precision of the developing curriculum document. The curriculum writing team examined each benchmark to ensure that any unique skills within omitted benchmarks were addressed as *Key Concepts* and condensed into other curriculum benchmarks.

The following list illustrates how the state benchmarks were clustered into strands.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM STRANDS
Strands and State Benchmark Summaries

Strand 1: Genre, Literature, and Understanding

- 8.2 Exploration and use of elements of the narrative genre
- 8.3 Exploration and use of elements of various expository genre
- 5.1 Quality classic and contemporary texts (oral, written, visual)
- 5.2 Shared human experiences in texts from around the world
- 5.3 Tensions among characters, themes, and issues in literature reflective of the human experience
- 5.4 Understanding our common heritage through cultural and historical contexts depicted in literature
- 5.5 Investigation and analysis of authenticity of portrayal of societies and cultures in literature
- 9.1 Exploration of universal themes and issues from oral, written, and visual texts
- 9.2 Synthesis of key concepts from multiple texts representing varied perspectives
- 9.3 Development of a thesis using supporting evidence and logical argument
- 10.1 Analysis of themes in relation to issues in their own lives
- 10.2 Use of literature to function as literate individuals within and beyond the classroom
- 10.3 Use of literature to explore and influence change in their community, nation, and world

Strand 2: Skills, Strategies, and Processes

- 7.1 Use of strategies in constructing meaning
- 7.2 Metacognition, monitoring progress, and flexible use of strategies
- 7.3 Self-reflection, evaluation, and goal setting
- 7.4 Demonstration of process of conveying meaning in writing, speaking, and visually representing
- 11.1 Generating, narrowing, and creating a thesis about questions, issues, and topics of interest
- 11.2 Determining appropriate resources for investigating a question or topic
- 11.3 Organizing, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluation to draw conclusions based on investigation
- 11.4 Use of multiple media to present conclusions
- 12.1 Development and application of personal standards for various communication contexts
- 12.2 Application of individual, shared, and academic standards in various contexts
- 12.3 Development and use of critical standards based on aesthetic qualities
- 12.4 Creation of collection of personal work based on individual, shared, and academic standards
- 12.5 Application of critical standards to evaluate the truth and ethics of a communicator

Strand 3: Language Conventions, Voice, and Communication*

- 1.1 ~~Use of reading for multiple purposes~~ (5.1, 9.2)
- 1.2 ~~Fluent reading of a variety of texts~~
- 1.3 ~~Multiple strategies for constructing meaning in reading~~ (7.1)
- 1.4 ~~Employment of multiple word recognition strategies~~ (Some aspects addressed in 4.2—4.5)
- 1.5 ~~Response to oral, written, and visual texts~~ (7.2, 7.3, 12.1—12.4)
- 2.1 ~~Fluent writing for multiple purposes~~ (6.2, 7.4, 10.2, 10.3)
- 2.2 ~~Use of author's techniques to convey meaning and influence audiences~~—(6.1, 6.3, 8.1, 8.4, 8.5)
- 2.3 ~~Planning, drafting, revising, and editing their own and others' texts~~ (7.4, 12.1—12.4)
- 2.4 ~~Use of appropriate language conventions in editing texts~~ (7.4, 8.1)
- 3.1 ~~Integration of listening, viewing, reading, speaking, visually representing, and writing for multiple purposes and in varied contexts~~ (5.1, 6.4, 8.4, 8.5, 9.2, 10.3, 11.4)

- 3.2 ~~Exploration and regulation of the communication process~~ (This one really deals with speaking and listening, as does 3.4, but should be addressed in 6.1, 6.3, 8.1, 8.4, 8.5)
- 3.3 ~~Fluent, appropriate, creative, critical, and confident use of the English language arts~~ (4.1, 6.2, 7.4, 10.2, 10.3)
- 3.4 ~~Use of verbal and nonverbal strategies~~ (Drop here, but be sure to pick up in 6.1 and 8.4)
- 3.5 ~~Employment of effective strategies to construct meaning~~ (7.1)
- 3.6 ~~Use of a variety of resources to determine meaning of vocabulary~~ (1.4, 4.2—4.5)
- 3.7 ~~Use of varied techniques to construct text, convey meaning, and express feelings to influence an audience~~ (6.1, 6.3, 8.1, 8.4, 8.5)
- 3.8 ~~Respond to oral, written, and visual texts by making connections with their own lives~~ (7.2, 7.3, 12.1—12.4)
- 4.1 Language patterns and usage
- 4.2 Transmission of culture through language patterns and vocabularies
- 4.3 Word origins and usages in various contexts, cultures, and communities
- 4.4 Denotation and connotation of word usage
- 4.5 Appropriate discourse for varied contexts, purposes, and audiences
- 6.1 Analysis of use of elements of effective communication
- 6.2 Use of multiple voices for multiple purposes in oral, written, and visual communication
- 6.3 Analysis of enduring voices of authors, speakers, and illustrators
- 6.4 Documentation of developing voice through multiple media
- 8.1 Use of mechanics/conventions to enhance and clarify understanding
- 8.4 Use of the craft (literary devices) of the speaker, writer, and illustrator to formulate and express ideas artistically
- 8.5 Use of characteristics of oral, written, and visual texts and textual aids to convey meaning and inspire audiences

*Note that each of the omitted benchmarks is cross-referenced to existing benchmarks which include similar content. Any unique skills within omitted benchmarks have been condensed into other curriculum benchmarks and addressed in the *Key Concepts*.

Benchmark Numbering System

The Bay-Arenac team found it most useful to retain the state’s numbering system for the BAISD grade-level benchmarks even though some benchmarks from the state ELA framework were collapsed into others. A consistent numbering system allows teachers and others to gain quick access to state documents, such as *MI CLiMB*, MEAP resources, etc. For example, Strand 3 benchmarks are numbered in this way: 1.2, 1.4, 4.1-4.5, 6.1-6.4, 8.1, and 8.4-8.5. The omitted benchmarks and numbers (1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1-2.4, 3.1-3.8) are simply dropped (their content is subsumed by other benchmarks), and notations in front of developed benchmarks correspond with state benchmark numbers.

Alignment to Grade Level Content Expectations

The federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation (2002) mandates the existence of a set of comprehensive *state* grade-level expectations for Grades 3-8 that are based on state content standards and grade-level cluster benchmarks. In July, 2002, a committee of Michigan ELA leaders conducted a study of more than 100 local and intermediate district, state, national, and international curriculum documents in order to develop the **Grade Level Content Expectations** (GLCE’s). Based on extensive feedback from a statewide review, these grade-level “targets” were revised and presented to the State Board of Education in December, 2002. The 30-33 statements represent the research-based *assessable* content of English language arts, and they reflect instructional and assessment practices of literacy teachers in Michigan.

Some local school districts have simply adopted the GLCE's as their own grade-level expectations, and some have used them (together with the ELA benchmarks) as resources in writing customized grade-level curriculum expectations. BAISD took the latter approach for the following reasons:

- The GLCE's became available halfway through the BAISD curriculum project; benchmarks were already drafted for Strands 1 and 2.
- The GLCE's were designed to reflect assessable content only; they were not originally intended as curriculum expectations, but instead were used to develop test and item specifications for *No Child Left Behind* MEAP testing in grades 3-8.
- Because they reflect "measurable" ELA content, the GLCE's should be broadened if used as curriculum benchmarks, in order to ensure coverage of all language arts modes and important concepts implicit in content standards.
- Still in draft form, the GLCE's continue to undergo revisions and have not been formally adopted by the Michigan Department of Education and the State Board of Education.

Please note that the appropriate GLCE's are listed as indicators of benchmark achievement within *Analysis of Benchmark* section for each benchmark.

Alignment to New English Language Arts MEAP Tests

In response to *No Child Left Behind* legislation, new English Language Arts MEAP tests in grades 3-8 and 11 will be administered in 2004-2005. Similar to current MEAP tests in format and purpose, they will assess students' ability to:

- draw on personal knowledge and experience to compose, revise, and edit a text on a given topic;
- comprehend text at literal, inferential, and critical analysis levels; and
- understand key ideas and generalizations across texts.

All components of the BAISD English Language Arts Curriculum are aligned with state curriculum documents and with the MEAP. Built into the program is a method of collecting evidence of achievement of the benchmarks. This comprehensive assessment system is designed to ensure that student learning is monitored and that intervention strategies are provided for those who need them. Students who demonstrate understanding of the knowledge and skills within the BAISD curriculum will indeed perform successfully on the new MEAP tests; more importantly, they will be equipped "*with the tools necessary to successfully navigate their world*" (ELA Vision).