

Memorandum



Coeur d'Alene Public Schools
DIVISION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING
INVEST | INSPIRE | INNOVATE

To: The Board of Trustees
Superintendent Cook

From: Dr. Kate Orozco, Director of Elementary Education and Instruction
Kate Keinert, Director of Equity and Federal Programs
Katie Graupman, Curriculum Director

Date: October 26, 2020

Re: Lucy Calkins and Balanced Literacy

Recently, *AMP Reports* published an article, [“Influential Literacy Expert Lucy Calkins is Changing her Views.”](#) explaining Lucy Calkins is shifting her thinking to emphasize the importance of phonics awareness. The AMP article reflects the fact that a number of literacy experts and school districts are concerned with what they call shortcomings in Calkins’ resources with respect to foundational skills. In light of this article, it is important to clarify for the school district community how Coeur d’Alene School District uses Lucy Calkins’ resources. In short, while the District uses Lucy Calkins’ resources as one piece of its balanced literacy approach, Lucy Calkins is not synonymous with the Coeur d’Alene School District ELA curriculum.

The Coeur d’Alene School District, for the past five years, has been investing in building our instructional capacities in reading. The foundation of this approach to teaching reading focuses on three dimensions of a “balanced literacy approach” which include:

- Foundational skills (print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition, and fluency),
- Understanding (or comprehension) (through monitoring for meaning; activating, utilizing and building background knowledge; asking questions; drawing inferences; determining importance; creating sensory images; synthesizing information; and problem solving), and
- Agency and passion for reading (through teaching reading in classrooms where community, discourse, student choice, and authentic reading are embedded in the classroom community).

We are assembling a team of K-5 ELA teachers to begin the work of inscribing this approach within our curriculum. The following describes our ongoing work to attend to each of these dimensions.

- **Foundational Skills:**

- **Current reality:** Beginning last year, we have directed resources toward Orton Gillingham professional development, and this year that focus continues, with a number of teachers experiencing OG online. Orton Gillingham professional development provides a multisensory approach to helping kids learn foundational skills.
- In addition, in spring 2019, the District purchased Lucy Calkins' phonics resources for general education, title, and special education teachers in order to address the explicit teaching of phonics instruction.
- **Next Steps:** We are expanding our Orton Gillingham professional development, and we will examine how our standards outline the necessary competencies of foundational reading skills.
- **Understanding:**
 - **Current reality:** For five years teacher teams have travelled to the Thinking Strategies Institutes in Denver in order to expand their understanding and skills in building rich literacy classrooms and implementing the workshop model. Teachers have learned how to design and guide children's learning through direct instruction, ample reading and journaling, teacher conferences with readers, and time for reflection and discourse. Teachers and administrators have been well versed in the thinking strategies of monitoring for meaning; activating, utilizing and building background knowledge; asking questions; drawing inferences; determining importance; creating sensory images; and synthesizing information.
 - **Next Steps:** We will continue to invite teachers to share the thinking strategies by organizing and facilitating "teaching labs" and "learning labs", where teachers design lessons together, host one another in classrooms, and provide time for reflection and feedback. We will continue to "spread the learning" through Teacher Leader Academy, and by inscribing this approach within our curriculum.
- **Agency and passion for reading in our young readers.**
 - **Current reality:** We know that young readers learn to read and become authentic readers when immersed in classrooms rich in real books, real reading, real community, and real choice. The district has invested in this by purchasing classroom libraries for classroom teachers so that students have access to high-quality, high-interest texts inside their classrooms. In addition, the district has purchased Lucy Calkins Writing Units of Study, which help students develop their writing skills using the workshop model. The workshop model offers students modeling, choice, and time to talk and reflect on their writing. The district also contracted with Dana Sorenson and Kristi Krier from PEBC to deliver sustained professional development to every district teacher to be able to use this resource well. Finally, Dana Sorenson is again providing hands-on training this year inside the classroom through modeling, planning, and conferencing individually with teachers.
 - **Next Steps:** We will continue to examine how reading workshops align with writing workshops and phonics instruction. Further, we will identify pathways to

build student choice and reading identity and begin work this year to inscribe this within our curriculum.

Put simply, our District is invested in exploring, developing and writing a K-5 literacy curriculum that includes a thorough approach to *all three* dimensions of balanced literacy: foundational skills, comprehension, and reader agency. And while our District team recognizes the value in Calkins' materials, we are aware of current widespread concern over the shortcomings of Calkins' materials with regard to foundational skills. Our curricular commitment to balanced literacy has led us, and will continue to lead us, to reach beyond Calkins resources in order to ensure each of our young readers develops strong foundational skills, as well as deep understanding, and an identity as a passionate reader.