Los Altos School District

Literacy Curriculum: Reading and Writing TK-8
Phonics K-2
Why Did LASD Adopt a Literacy Curriculum?

In accordance with the Common Core State Standards (2010) and best practices in literacy instruction, the Los Altos School District has adopted an integrated transitional-kindergarten to eighth grade program, which encompasses the philosophies of balanced literacy instruction. The primary objectives of our literacy program are to maximize individual student potential, meaningfully connect reading, writing, and thinking, and improve district-wide achievement in literacy.
As part of a thorough adoption process, LASD first determined the tenets of a balanced literacy pedagogy of instruction using The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum. The components of the balanced literacy model incorporates a gradual release of responsibility as students develop their reading fluency and comprehension skills through explicit direct instruction of various reading strategies that guide students to understand the literal meaning, implied meaning, synthesizing, connecting, and determining deeper meanings of a text, as well as identifying and evaluating the author’s craft.
Why did LASD Adopt the K-8 Units of Study in Reading and Writing Curriculum by Lucy Calkins?

In the Spring of 2017, the LASD Board adopted the K-8 Lucy Calkins Units of Study in Reading and Writing out of Columbia University’s Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. The main goal is to accelerate reading and writing development in all students through personalized literacy instruction. Based on decades of teaching and research, the curriculum layers and spirals on strategies and skills moving students from concrete step-by-step to more implicit, fluid, and responsive use of the strategies throughout a school year, as well as, throughout the K-8 experience (Calkins 2015).
How is LASD Supporting Teachers in Implementing and Understanding Balanced Literacy and the Curriculum?

To support this goal, teachers have access to a variety of professional development opportunities, which has included a Homegrown Reading and Writing Institute with staff developers from Teachers College. Additionally, LASD has provided an Instructional Support Teacher who works closely with teachers to ensure a balanced literacy program for all students.
The Los Altos School District’s Literacy Curriculum fully aligns with the expectations set forth in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative. In order to insure our students receive the core experiences of reading, writing, language, speaking, and listening, our literacy units encompass or surpass the expectations detailed in the standards.
Balanced Literacy is the realization that students need to use multiple strategies to become proficient readers and to meet the standards. It provides and cultivates the skills of reading, writing, thinking, speaking and listening for all students using the best teaching strategies. This happens with an intentional combination of explicit direct instruction, supported student practice, and independent student practice.
Balanced Literacy

LASD uses the Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum for Pre-K through 8th grade, which describes the eight components of a balanced literacy program:

1. Interactive Read-Aloud and Literature Discussion
2. Shared and Performance Reading
3. Writing About Reading
4. Writing
5. Oral and Visual Communication
6. Technological Communication
7. Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study
8. Guided Reading

Taken together, the eight continuu present a broad picture of the learning that takes place during the important years of school.

The progress of learners across these continua, or even within each of them, is not an even, step-by-step process. Students learn as they have opportunities and give attention in different ways. A learner might make tremendous gains in one area while seeming to almost “stand still” in another.

LASD believes we need to provide these learning opportunities and guide student’s attention so that learning in one area informs and supports learning in others. Looking across the continua, we can see patterns of progress over time. Learners progress in their individual ways, but they ultimately reach the same goal—a complex and flexible literacy processing system (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017).
The Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) instructional structure moves the cognitive load from the teacher responsibility to student responsibility through explicit direct instruction, supported practice to independent practice to application and transfer of the learning.

GRR can happen within a day or over longer time periods. A more complete implementation model for the gradual release of responsibility recognizes the recursive nature of learning and has teachers cycle purposefully through purpose setting and guided instruction, collaborative learning, and independent experiences.

The selected literacy curriculum, The Units of Study in Phonics, Reading, and Writing by Lucy Calkins and The Reading and Writing Project follow the GRR instructional model.
Gradual Release of Responsibility

**Teacher Responsibility**

- Focused Instruction
  - "I do it"

- Guided Instruction
  - "We do it"

- Collaborative Learning
  - "You do it together"

- Independent Learning
  - "You do it alone"

**Student Responsibility**
A Balanced Literacy Program includes:

- Explicit Phonics Instruction
- Reading Aloud & Instructional Read-Aloud
- Shared Reading/Writing
- Guided Reading
- Independent Reading
The Units of Study in Phonics
K-2
Curriculum by Lucy Calkins and Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Phonics instruction supports children’s reading and writing: to be useful, phonics must be transferred. Every message sent during phonics instruction needs to be angled to support transfer to reading and writing. The goal is not for kids to become linguistic scholars. Instead, phonics instruction only matters because it enables reading and writing.

RESEARCH

The Units of Study in Phonics series has grown out of the TCRWP’s decades of research and practice in the teaching of reading and writing. Given that phonics is important only insofar as it transfers to reading and writing, it is essential that a phonics curriculum draw on broad, deep, and applied knowledge of how students develop as writers, readers, speaker, and listeners. In addition, the sequence of the Units of Study in Phonics follows a pathway that is widely supported by an enormous body of research including the work of Isabel Beck, Donna Scanlon, Pat and Jim Cunningham, Rollanda O’Connor, Marilyn Adams, Tim Rasinski, Donald Bear, Wiley Blevins, and the late Marie Clay.
UNIT SEQUENCE

The sequence of the Units of Study in Phonics follows a pathway that is widely supported in this research. Suffice it to say that whether children are studying the Units of Study in Phonics or Bear’s Words Their Way (2016) or Cunningham’s Phonics They Use (2016) or Fundations (2012), or Fountas and Pinnell’s Phonics (2017), or any one of many other programs, the sequence of topics they study will not be widely different.

Always, children first develop phonemic awareness: learning to segment words into phonemes, to blend phonemes into word parts and words, and to rhyme and play with language. Simultaneously, children learn the alphabetic principle—learning letter names and sounds and formation. They also become immersed in concepts of print. By late fall, kindergartners progress to learning rimes (word families such as -at: rat, cat) and digraphs (SH, TH, CH); in the late winter, they study short vowels and begin to learn vowel flexibility. Blends will be important, too. Many of those topics will need to be revisited before kindergarten is over, and again in first grade. Throughout all of this, kids learn high-frequency words—about fifty of them during kindergarten. The progression unfolds further in first grade.
The Units of Study for Teaching Reading and Writing
K-8 Curriculum by Lucy Calkins and Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCWRP) “aims to prepare kids for any reading and writing task they will face or set themselves, to turn them into life-long, confident readers and writers who display agency and independence in their future endeavors. That is, TCRWP aims to reach beyond state testing and fulfillment of tasks for schools. They aim to strengthen a generation of readers and writers.”

ALIGNMENT

The core values of TCRWP fully align and support LASD’s mission to inspire a passion for learning and prepare all our student to thrive in our rapidly changing global community.

In addition to the commonly held values, the instruction of the Units of Study build on itself, so skills are developed incrementally across the years, not in a one shot test-prep cram session. Because of the recursive nature of the curriculum, schools become a community of practice, where the best methods of teaching and learning work side-by-side leading children into more proactive, more complex, and more responsible roles in their learning.
The Units of Study for Teaching Reading and Writing

STRUCTURE OF THE UNITS

The Units of Study is a spiral curriculum, which allows the work of one grade level to build upon the work of another. Specifically, the unit will first introduce the students to foundational reading or writing work and will grow increasingly more difficult or challenging as they progress through the unit, the year, and grade levels.

Each unit is made up of bends, which are places in the curriculum that pivots on a skill or strategy where we want to challenge and lift a child’s thinking, reading and writing skills. One way to envision the bends is to think of them as switchbacks that help you climb a mountainside. While taking a path that is a straight path up the mountain is possible, it is also incredibly more difficult than to cut across the sides of the mountain along switchbacks. In other words, each unit, as it bends along the learning path, provides students instruction, opportunities for practice, and concrete doable goals, so they can progress to meet and exceed standards.

Furthermore, the units are topic based, so the instructions is focused on skill acquisition not comprehension of the topic. In other words, the topic is dispensable. For example, while students are studying how to forecast hurricanes and floods, they are being taught how to synthesize as they read, drawing graphs, charts, and illustrations into their understanding of the article. They’re learning how to take notes across multiple sources, how to evaluate a source, and so on.
OVERVIEW OF OUTCOMES

Over the course of the LASD K-8 experience, students will receive support in both reading fiction and nonfiction, and with the three types of writing: narrative, persuasive/opinion/argument, and informational and functional/procedural. The Units of Study are designed to meet the challenges of the Common Core State Standards and the CAASPP, as well as integrating instruction to develop 21st Century skills.

In LASD, we focus on the the rigor of the current grade level, as well as supporting growth to exceed expectations. Like any competitive runner whose focus is beyond the finish line, LASD does not merely aim for the current grade level goals but beyond, with plans to bring every readers and writer along.
Student’s reading development is monitored in grades kindergarten through eighth through the use of numerous assessments such as regular benchmarks, retelling, running records, and guided reading levels and progress. Found in these two graphics are the reading skills students will build from unit to unit and year to year.

### READING INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literal Comprehension</th>
<th>Interpretive Reading</th>
<th>Analytic Reading</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientering</td>
<td>Inferring within Text/Cohesion</td>
<td>Analyzing Parts of a Text in Relation to the Whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envisioning</td>
<td>Cross Text(s) Synthesis</td>
<td>Analyzing Author’s Craft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring for Sense</td>
<td>Comparing and Contrasting</td>
<td>Analyzing Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency: the sound of my voice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical Reading: growing ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation and Sentence Complexity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questioning the Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Idea(s) and Supporting Details/Summary</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### READING FICTION TEXTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literal Comprehension</th>
<th>Interpretive Reading</th>
<th>Analytic Reading</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientering</td>
<td>Inferring about Characters and other Story Elements: character traits</td>
<td>Analyzing Parts of a Story in Relation to the Whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envisioning/Predicting</td>
<td>Character Response/Change</td>
<td>Analyzing Author’s Craft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring for Sense: fitting the pieces together</td>
<td>Determining Themes/Cohesion</td>
<td>Analyzing Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story Elements: time, plot, setting</td>
<td>Comparing and Contrasting Story Elements and Themes</td>
<td>Critical Reading: growing ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing Point of View</td>
<td>Supporting Thinking with Text Evidence</td>
<td>Questioning the Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency: the sound of my voice</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Punctuation and Sentence Complexity</td>
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<td>Main Idea(s) and Supporting Details/Summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retelling/Summary/Synthesis within Text</td>
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Writing Workshop: Guiding Principles

The principles of Writing Workshop create a learning environment that:

- Encourages independence and gives the young writer a high degree of choice within a framework
- Structures the environment to encourage writers to take risks and learn their craft
- Provides a scaffolding support system to all writers, while giving students frequent feedback to their writing
- Has a regular and predictable time to write and amount of time
- Gives students direct instruction in writing by different methods; whole class, small group, individual
- Uses literature to teach students the craft of writing
Every writing unit of study from K-8 will cover Narrative, Informational/Expository, and Persuasive/Argument. The units focus on three overall concepts of writing:

- **Structure of writing**
  - Leads (opening/introduction)
  - Transitions
  - Endings (conclusion)
  - Organization

- **Development of ideas**
  - Elaboration (the details used)
  - Craft (the way ideas are expressed)

- **Conventions**
  - Spelling
  - Punctuation and Sentence Structure