



Indicator Explanation



CORE FUNCTION	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Instruction	Provide rigorous evidence-based instruction	3B.12 Teachers in grades 4-12 place a strong emphasis on students' ability to read to learn as demonstrated in their curriculum and pacing guides and classroom walkthroughs.

Explanation: Teachers need to continue to build on the skills that students were taught in the primary grades while also ensuring that students are ready to move to the next level of reading comprehension, fluency, and reading for learning. Some schools may utilize a 90-120 minute “reading block” of time to reinforce the importance of reading, however, it is not necessarily the only way to create the culture of reading in a school. Making sure that all teachers, no matter what subject is being taught, reinforce, and teach the reading skills necessary to interact with a text and extract meaning is also an effective means of teaching literacy.

Questions: How are teachers in the upper elementary, middle, and high school building on the foundation established in the primary grades for reading? Does every subject have a reading element infused into the instruction? Is the school allowing enough time for students to read in every class? Is there vertical and horizontal alignment of the curriculum to support and enhance reading across grade levels and subjects?

The idea of a block of uninterrupted time for literacy did not exist until the Reading First program was introduced. At that time, the federal Department of Education put into place the expectation of a 90-minute reading block. The National Reading Panel had previously established the Big 5 (phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) and Reading First then put into place the reading block in which to teach the Big 5. At that time, however, it was not specified how this amount of time was arrived at or how best to use the time to promote literacy and ensure all students were reading on level.

Since the sunset of the Reading First program, the idea of the 90-minute time block as stuck as being research based and effective practice. The caveat is this: time is simply a measure and does not necessarily equate to all students receiving the instruction necessary to become better readers. Shanahan (2020) writes this:

In education, time is a measure of the amount of curriculum—explanation and practice—that children are exposed to. It is the curriculum and how it is taught that makes the difference; time is simply a measure of that. What if a curriculum is not sound? That is, what if being exposed to it does not usually lead someone to read, or repeat valuable lessons students have already mastered or fails to offer sufficient practice? An hour extra of something that doesn't work won't improve things. Time is just a measure, right? An hour of low-quality teaching is an hour wasted.

There are a plethora of suggestions and free resources now available for teachers to be able to create their reading instruction in such a way that reduces time wasted. It is generally agreed that students need a balance of instruction activities such as:

- Read alouds
- Shared reading (text complexity should be above current level; focus on comprehension skills;



increase fluency through choral reading or partner reading)

- Guided reading
- Independent reading
- Writing workshop (guided and independent practice)
- Direct instruction
- Word work (phonics, spelling, vocabulary)
- Maximize practice time
- Authentic reading and thinking that challenges students (peer talk and open-ended questions)
- Use tough questions
- Alternate silent time and action time

Quartarola, (1984) concluded that “the quality of instructional time was at least as important as the quantity of allocated instructional time. Having blocks of time devoted to literacy are important, but not enough to ensure that the instructional programs meet all students needs. Schools need to not only focus on the uninterrupted blocks of time fitting into the school schedule, but also pay attention more deeply to the quality of how instructional time was spent. In order to ensure literacy and reading skills are being taught and reinforced across content areas, consider professional development for teachers who may not have had extensive training in teaching reading and literacy.

References

- Quartarola, B. (1984). *A research paper on time on task and the extended school day/year and their relationship to improving student achievement*. Association of California School Administrators.
- Rosenholtz, S. J. (1985). Effective schools: Interpreting the evidence. *American Journal of Education*, 93(3), 352–388.
- Shanahan, T. (2020, August). *Is amount of reading instruction a panacea?* <https://www.readingrockets.org/blogs/shanahan-literacy/amount-reading-instruction-panacea>