

LANGUAGE ARTS/READING

The English language arts include a knowledge of language, the development of its use as a basic means of communication, and an appreciation of its artistry as expressed in literature. Toward this end, schools should develop richly literate environments in which students become effective users of language, information, and ideas. The language learning process should be a joyful experience in which students develop a variety of strategies to fulfill their educational and personal goals.

An outstanding language arts program reflects critical and creative thinking and a harmonious balance of its several components: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. Language skills are inseparable from their contexts, from the actual speaking, writing, and reading experiences. The principles guiding the development and support of the language arts/reading program must provide fertile ground in which the program can not only exist, but continuously grow and inspire teachers and students.

These principles include the following:

- ◆ Literature is the heart of the language arts curriculum. All students at all levels need rich experiences with good literature. An ideal program moves beyond strict adherence to a set of materials, and is centered on themes appropriate to given groups of students. Literature should include multicultural selections of traditional classical and modern works. A quality literature program includes biographies, essays, and other non-fiction, as well as poetry, drama, stories, and novels.
- ◆ For students to apply reading skills in real-life situations, they must become skilled, independent readers of both informational text and text which requires them to perform a task. Teachers must assist students in learning to apply effective strategies as they read for different purposes.
- ◆ Reading is not passive; rather it is an interactive process involving the text itself (including all the writer brings to it), the reader (and all her/his prior knowledge), and the context of the reading situation. One role of the teacher is to implement strategies that help students effectively enter into and move out of the assigned pieces. Both silent and oral reading have an important place in the curriculum. Daily teacher read-alouds are appropriate for all students, even if only for a few minutes to enhance a selection under study.
- ◆ Reading and writing are inextricably linked to one another, as well as to the other elements of a language arts program: thinking, listening, speaking, and viewing.
- ◆ Writing is a process that includes prewriting, drafting, sharing, revising, editing, and publishing. While the total process is not required for every composition assignment, it is important to have students learn the process and have the opportunity to develop some pieces over a period of time. In writing, particularly for unskilled writers, the first priority is fluency; after fluency comes the concern for correctness. “Publishing” is a fundamental part of the writing process for all students, but not for all pieces of writing. The use of technology in the writing process is a desirable component of a reading/language arts program.
- ◆ Assessment and instruction should be continually interwoven. Student proficiency in applying language arts/reading skills and strategies should be determined by a variety of means including teacher observation, self-evaluation, and alternate means of assessment, as well as formal testing. This assessment should provide continuous feedback to guide instruction.
- ◆ Skills taught in isolation are often meaningless. Reading and writing skills (spelling, decoding, mechanics, usage, and grammar) must be taught but, most importantly, must be applied and reinforced in authentic contexts.
- ◆ Although students’ language is valued and used as a means of learning, changing, and growing, standard English is the expected language of the classroom.

- ◆ Vocabulary and comprehension are best taught through the use of varied strategies before, during, and after the reading of selections under study.
- ◆ The school library/media center, with its rich variety of print and non-print materials, is a vital resource to the overall curriculum. The library/media specialist is also a valuable resource, to be considered an additional teacher in the school's efforts toward increased literacy.
- ◆ Instructional grouping should be flexible to meet the needs of all students. Group sizes should vary with the objectives, purposes, and the materials of the lessons. Cooperative learning strategies play a role in these groupings (e.g., in writing/peer editing groups, buddy reading, skills studies). The teacher serves as director, facilitator, and coach of student learning.
- ◆ Students should be active and involved participants in their learning experiences as they process and produce language. Students at all levels need to be taught flexible strategies to use in monitoring and directing their own learning.
- ◆ Oral language activities (e.g., informal discussions, dramatic and humorous interpretations, poetry readings, oral interpretation of literature, debate, original oratory) are essential to every student's development.
- ◆ For students to become truly literate, they need to read and write daily. It is important that their learning community help them meet and even surpass the district goals for writing and for reading.
- ◆ DCPS students represent many nationalities and ethnic backgrounds and bring with them a rich array of multicultural experiences. The oral language, literature, and composition activities of the language arts curriculum must include, reflect on, and honor this rich diversity.
- ◆ Home, family, and community play an indispensable role as full partners with the school in the development of student literacy.