

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

LITERACY INITIATIVES

Overview Of Literacy Initiatives

District staff partner and work with teachers to explore evidence-based literacy instruction and assessment practices. This year, evaluations were conducted on 13 district-led initiatives that supported literacy instruction and learning of approximately 1,600 Surrey students. Teachers who participated in the literacy initiatives were surveyed about the initiative's impacts. In the table below, we provide an overview of the 13 literacy initiatives evaluated.

Table 1. Surrey School District Literacy Initiatives

LITERACY INITIATIVE		DESCRIPTION
1.	A Balanced Approach to Literacy for Early Career Teachers Series	Early Career teachers explore considerations of Gradual Release of Responsibility model in facets of their literacy instruction.
2.	Changing Results for Young Readers Inquiry Series: Surrey Blended Focus	Teachers delve deeper into their literacy practices in the area of reading, teaching, and learning, through a supported inquiry process.
3.	Credentialing Workshop for Literacy 10 Assessment	Teachers are oriented to the cross-curricular provincial Graduation Assessment and have the opportunity to become familiar with scoring rubrics and scoring guides.
4.	Exploring New Book Club Titles for Grades 6 through 9	Teachers explore and consider new novels, each with opportunities to tackle complex ideas and better reflect identities and lived realities of their learners, to potentially refresh Book Club selections offered to their learners.
5–6.	Exploring Book Clubs in Intermediate: Picture Books Focus Series and Novels Focus Series	Teachers explore Book Club instructional frameworks and thinking routines to support deeper interactions with text, critical understandings and the cultivation of dialogue.
7.	Guiding Students in Authentic Research	Teachers explore how to create interdisciplinary essential questions, guide students through the research process as well as present their findings effectively and authentically, avoiding plagiarism.
8–9.	Leveraging the Power of Conferencing Series: Reader's Cohort and Writer's Cohort	Teachers explore ways to sustainably embed responsive conferencing routines into existing and reimagined literacy instructional and assessment practices.
10.	Literacy Essentials Series in Grades 6–9	Teachers explore cross-curricular inquiry opportunities to foster authentic opportunities for learners to develop essential literacy skills.
11.	Literacy K-12 Professional Book Club Series	Teachers explore opportunities and share their thinking about the impact of Read Alouds for their Face-to-Face and Surrey Blended class communities.
12.	Picture Books Inquiry Series	Teachers continue their inquiry work that began the previous year, into a variety of powerful uses for picture books in intermediate classrooms.
13.	Powerful Read Alouds Inquiry Series: K–3 Focus	Teachers deepen their existing understandings and explore new possibilities of how Read Alouds can powerfully support their young readers and writers.

Evaluation Methodology

The eleven-item Surrey Schools Literacy Initiative Reflectionnaire was completed by a portion of Surrey teachers who took part in one of the 13 literacy initiatives during the 2020/21 academic year. The reflectionnaire includes three closed-ended rating-scale questions and six open-ended questions. The rating scale questions ask teachers to rate their level of agreement with various impacts the literacy initiatives had on teaching practices and student learning. The open-ended questions ask teachers to reflect on how they contextualised and applied their professional learning through a series of six sentence starters about initial observations, wonders, actions, and outcomes. These are supplemented with introductory questions asking teachers to provide details about their teaching assignments this year and to select which initiatives they participated in.

Quantitative data from close-ended reflectionnaire items were described and represented in figures that provide counts and percentages of responses. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques.¹ This began with a line-by-line analysis of responses to open-ended questions, identifying and coding salient features in the data. These codes were then collated into higher-level themes, refined, and compared with findings of the quantitative analysis.



¹ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>

Summary Of Results

Most teachers who responded to the reflectionnaire taught primary or intermediate students; a handful taught secondary students. Most teachers had face to face classes for the full year. Some taught Blended, and a few taught in both or were non-enrolling. Many teachers took part in multiple initiatives throughout the academic year. Some of the most-attended initiatives by survey respondents include Intermediate Picture Book Inquiry, Powerful Read Alouds Inquiry, and Changing Results for Young Readers (Blended).

Critical Thinking and Comprehension Skills

Teachers who took part in the literacy initiatives discussed the strategies they implemented, changes to their instruction, and the opportunities they created to support critical thinking and conversation skills. Some strategies were meant to encourage and build confidence among students so they participate in discussions. Other teachers found that they needed to select more diverse and interesting texts to help stimulate rich discussions and for students to make more meaningful connections with what they are reading.

One teacher, who taught intermediate students face-to-face for the full year, and took part in one of the book club initiatives, noticed students “were sharing more surface level ideas and not able to go deep with their thinking.” The teacher wondered if their students were “thinking deeply while reading,” and chose to take action by providing and using “a range of thoughtfully chosen texts to help facilitate more authentic, deep discussion.” As a result, the teacher found that “participation and quality of ideas increased.” By taking part in the literacy initiatives this year, the teacher learned “the value of picture books and encouraging students to think while reading” and plans to continue “looking for texts that students can connect to and dig deep into.” This was reflected in the experiences of other teachers who observed greater connections with texts, which led to improved quality in the ideas students were discussing.

Writing Skills

Many teachers who focused on improving their students’ writing skills observed that their students struggled with motivation, confidence, or engagement with their writing.

One teacher in particular said their students “did not see themselves as writers,” while others said students “were reluctant to write about things they actually cared about” or commonly asked how much they have to write. Teachers wondered if frequent writing conferences, writers’ workshops, or offering “different types of writing experiences” would motivate their students and help them find joy in writing.

Teachers took action to engage students in writing by creating opportunities for students to take ownership of their work, or by providing more direct support in the form of small group and one-on-one writing conferences. One intermediate teacher who taught face-to-face for the full year took action by “giving [students] lots of choices on the topics they could write on,” and found that their students “actually started looking forward to



writing workshops,” were able to “set their own goals,” and “were in charge of their writing.” This teacher learned “about the importance of empowering children to take charge of their learning.” Additionally, the teachers plans to continue with their own learning process.

Another teacher, who taught in Blended for the full year, took action by “implementing small group writing conferences.” The teacher noticed their students “enjoyed learning about their own writing and implementing strategies to improve their writing in relation to how it is received by the reader/ audience.” The teacher planned to “further curate a library of mentor texts and continue writing conferences with my students.”



Vocabulary and Reading Skills

Many primary teachers focused on individual or small groups of readers. One primary school teacher who taught in Blended for the full year initially observed that their students had low confidence, were unmotivated to read, and “had difficulties decoding and would sound out letters one at a time while reading.” The teacher wondered if “a focus on common CVC word families and re-reading familiar passages would help the students be able to recognize and decode more words as well as increase reading confidence,” and took action by “reading books with lots of rhyme during class,” and assigning “weekly poems that focused on CVC word families.”¹

The same teacher noticed that their students required “lots of repetition and guided practice,” and that it could take several days of “reading and working with a poem before students felt confident enough to read it by themselves.” However, the teacher noticed that “by the end of the week, students would be confident enough to read the poems.” Through this process, the teacher learned that “having frequent sessions with the students and having lots of guided practice allowed them to slowly feel more confident and more capable of practicing on their own,” and using a “short decodable passage” allowed their students to have success. The teacher planned “to continue to use this strategy with future students,” and “continue to work with these students using word families to increase students’ ability to decode and read independently.”

Oral Language, Listening, and Conversational Skills

Teachers who focused on their students' communication, listening and oral language skills took part in a variety of initiatives. Teachers confirmed and explained that reading aloud is a powerful way to engage children in the literacy process. Teachers explained that read alouds increased student participation and motivation before, during, and 1 CVC word families include words made up of a consonant, vowel, and consonant sound. after the read aloud experience. This practice of reading aloud to children helped support their listening and speaking abilities.

One primary teacher who took part in the Powerful Read Alouds Inquiry initiative observed that the students "were very engaged in read alouds" and wondered what strategies could be used to "support this engagement and excitement to share their ideas and connections." The teacher wanted to support

students' engagement and enthusiasm to share ideas, so the teacher took action by "allowing students to do their own read alouds to the class where they can stop and explain and give a connection."

An intermediate teacher who took part in one of the book club initiatives observed that their students "needed guidance in sharing their ideas with the rest of the class." The teacher wondered if their students "felt safe sharing with others or not, or if they were shy." After ensuring "students knew that all perspectives are welcomed," the teacher outlined behaviours and strategies that promoted motivation, and thereby fostered increased safety, interest, and learning. As a result of the strategies, the teacher had mentioned that "slowly students started sharing their perspectives, even the ones that were shy, or had anxiety...".



Qualitative Results

Teachers began with the sentence starter “Initially I observed...” Approximately half of the mentions (53%) were related to students’ need to improve literacy skills, and nearly three in ten mentions were related to observations of student disengagement and a need to adjust assessment and teaching practices. For example, many teachers noted that students “lacked confidence in their writing”, “needed help understanding texts,” or struggled with “going deep with their thinking” and “making meaning.” Some teachers also observed that they needed to learn more about how to support students with specific skills, or about using strategies such as read alouds.

Table 2 provides the themes and sub-themes generated from the responses of teachers regarding what they initially observed in the literacy initiative.

Table 2. “Initially I observed...” Themes and Sub-Themes

THEME	%	SUB-THEME	%
1. Students Need Additional Literacy Skills	53%	a. Students Need to Improve Critical Thinking and Comprehension Skills	18%
		b. Students Need to Improve Writing Skills	4%
		c. Students Need to Improve Reading Skills	18%
		d. Students Need to Improve Oral Language and Conversational Skills	13%
2. Student Disengagement and Need for Alternative Activities and Teaching Strategies	36%	a. Students Have Limited Confidence	8%
		b. Students Have Limited Engagement and Motivation	15%
		c. Need to Adjust Assessment, Teaching, and Literacy Activities	13%
3. Student Benefits from Activities and Teaching Approaches	11%	a. Students Were Motivated and Engaged	3%
		b. Effective Activities and Improved Student Performance	3%
		c. Students Have Some Already Developed Literacy Skills	5%
THEME TOTAL	100%	SUB-THEME TOTAL	100%

For the sentence starter “then I wondered...”, most mentions (57%) were related to addressing students’ limited engagement and the need to adjust teaching and assessment practices. Teachers wondered how to access all readers while teaching online, whether students have enough time on their assessments, or how to make time to meet with students individually. In addition, nearly four in ten mentions (37%) involved wondering about strategies that targeted specific literacy skills, how to implement them, or what their outcomes would be. For example, wondering if students would benefit from “more focus on phonemic awareness” or “using picture books and versatile strategies.”

Table 3 provides the themes and sub-themes generated from the responses of teachers regarding what they wondered after making their initial observation.

Table 3. “Then I wondered...” Themes and Sub-Themes

THEME	%	SUB-THEME	%
1. About Outcomes of and Ways to Implement Strategies that Target Specific Literacy Skills	37%	a. About Activities and Strategies for Building Critical Thinking and Comprehension Skills	11%
		b. About Activities and Strategies for Building Writing Skills	4%
		c. About Activities and Strategies for Building Vocabulary and Reading Skills	17%
		d. About Activities and Strategies for Building Oral Language and Conversational Skills	5%
2. How to Address Student Disengagement and Need for Alternative Activities and Teaching Strategies	57%	a. How to Address Students' Limited Confidence	3%
		b. How to Address Students' Limited Engagement, Motivation, and Ownership of Learning	19%
		c. Ways to Adjust and Develop Assessment, Feedback, Scheduling and Teaching Practices	22%
		d. About Selecting and Integrating Effective Texts	13%
3. About Students' Existing Literacy Skills, Abilities and Challenges	6%	a. About Students' Existing Literacy Skills, Abilities and Challenges	6%
THEME TOTAL	100%	SUB-THEME TOTAL	100%

Teachers then answered the prompt “I then took action by...”. The highest percentage of mentions were related to implementing specific strategies and activities focused on students’ critical thinking and comprehension skills (11%), and on students’ reading and vocabulary skills (13%). Another 9% of mentions were also related to selecting appropriate and effective texts for working on students’ critical thinking and comprehension skills.

Table 4 provides the themes and sub-themes generated from the responses of teachers regarding what action they took after making their observations.

Table 4. “I then took action by...” Themes and Sub-Themes

THEME	%	SUB-THEME	%
1. Working on Students' Critical Thinking and Comprehension Skills	32%	a. Implementing Strategies, Teaching, and Creating Opportunities for Students to Practice Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills	11%
		b. Using Strategies that Encourage Confidence, Enjoyment, Ownership, and Personal Connection to Text	6%
		c. Preparing, Planning and Adjusting Assessments, Schedules, Teaching, and Literacy Activities	5%
		d. Selecting and Incorporating Appropriate, Effective, and Diverse Texts	9%
		e. Providing One-to-One, Small Group, and Direct Support	1%
2. Working on Students' Writing Skills	14%	a. Implementing Activities and Teaching Focused on Literacy Strategies and Writing Skills	4%
		b. Using Strategies that Encourage Confidence, Motivation, Ownership and Working Independently	2%
		c. Adjusting Assessment, Teaching, and Literacy Practices	1%
		d. Selecting and Incorporating Appropriate, Effective, and Diverse Texts	3%
		e. Providing One-to-One, Small Group, and Direct Support	3%

THEME	%	SUB-THEME	%
3. Working on Students' Vocabulary and Reading Skills	30%	a. Teaching, Reviewing, and Practicing Specific Literacy, Reading and Vocabulary Skills with Students	13%
		b. Using Strategies that Encourage Enjoyment, Interests, and Engagement with Ideas and Peers	3%
		c. Adjusting, Improving, Testing, and Developing Schedules, Activities, and Teaching Practices	6%
		d. Selecting and Incorporating Appropriate, Effective, and Diverse Texts	4%
		e. Providing One-to-One, Small Group, and Direct Support	4%
4. Working on Students' Oral Language, Listening, and Conversational Skills	16%	a. Teaching Specific Oral Language, Sharing, and Literacy Skills and Strategies	4%
		b. Using Strategies and Activities that Encourage Confidence, Enjoyment, Connection to Ideas, and Engagement in Discussion and Texts	6%
		c. Preparing Material, Adjusting and Trying Different Teaching Practices	4%
		d. Selecting and Incorporating Appropriate, Effective, and Diverse Texts	3%
5. Developing or Improving Teaching Approaches	8%	a. Implementing Specific Strategies and Activities for Teaching and Engaging Students	2%
		b. Learning About and Making Improvements to Assessments and Teaching Practices, and Professional Development	2%
		c. Selecting and Incorporating Appropriate, Effective, and Diverse Texts	4%
THEME TOTAL	100%	SUB-THEME TOTAL	100%

As a result of these actions, teachers noticed that students were improving the quality of their ideas and understanding (34% of mentions) and their abilities to apply specific skills and strategies (38%). Teachers noticed students could “organically make connections” or that students began “engaging on a deeper level after trying out strategies and conferencing.” However, 29% of mentions also noted further challenges or conditions with implementing and adjusting teaching practices, and with students’ confidence and literacy skills.

Table 5 provides the themes and sub-themes generated from the responses of teachers regarding what they noticed after they took action.

Table 5. “I noticed that...” Themes and Sub-Themes

THEME	%	SUB-THEME	%
1. Students Improved the Quality of Their Ideas, Meaningful Connections, and Understanding of Text	34%	a. Students Improved Critical Thinking and Comprehension Skills	12%
		b. Students Were Making Real-World, Meaningful Connections	10%
		c. Students Were Engaged	12%
2. Students Were Improving and Applying Skills and Strategies	3%	a. Students Increased their Confidence and Ability to Discuss and Share Thoughts	17%
		b. Students Enjoyed Using New Strategies	10%
		c. Students Were Learning, Improving, and Applying Reading and Writing Skills and Strategies	10%
3. There Was Room to Adjust Approaches and Implementation of Strategies and Address Students' Challenges	29%	a. Students had Difficulties with Confidence and Specific Literacy Skills	16.5%
		b. There Were Conditions for Successfully Approaching, Implementing and Adjusting Teaching Strategies	12.5%
THEME TOTAL	100%	SUB-THEME TOTAL	100%

In response to the sentence starter “I learned...”, the highest percentage of mentions (37.5%) were about student capacities and limitations. Teachers learned about the tools, conditions, time, and environments that students need to learn effectively (14% of mentions). Teachers also learned to recognize students’ need for additional guidance and provide it (14.5% of mentions). A small number of teachers also found that students are more capable and engaged than what they had expected (9% of mentions).

Table 6 provides the themes and sub-themes generated from the responses of teachers regarding what they learned after having taken action.

Table 6. “I learned...” Themes and Sub-Themes

THEME	%	SUB-THEME	%
1. Effective Use of Strategies for Teaching Literacy	33%	a. Effective Use of Group Activities, Discussion, Read-Alouds, Mentor Texts, and Books	11%
		b. Effective Use of Conferencing, Direct Teaching, Modelling, and Learning Goals	9%
		c. General Ideas and Strategies for Teaching Literacy	6%
		d. Challenges and Capabilities in Implementing Literacy Strategies	7%
2. About Student Capacities and Limitations	37.5%	a. Students are More Capable Than Expected and are Excited to Improve Literacy Skills	9%
		b. About Time, Tools, and Supportive Environment Students Need to Learn and Apply Literacy Skills	14%
		c. To Provide and Recognize Student Need for Additional Support and Guidance	14.5%
3. The Value, Importance or Benefits of Specific Literacy Strategies and Teaching Practices	29.5%	a. Value or Benefits of Read-Alouds, Re-Reading, Direct Teaching, and Modelling	13%
		b. Value of Personal Connection and Supporting Students’ Ownership of Learning	6%
		c. Value or Benefits of Reading and Studying Diverse Texts	10.5%
THEME TOTAL	100%	SUB-THEME TOTAL	100%



The last sentence starter was “I plan to...” Almost two-thirds of mentions (64%) were related to continuing to use specific strategies, practices, and activities that teachers had learned or been implementing. Within this theme, most mentions were related to using strategies and activities focused on discussion, conversation and thinking (17%), and on reading, writing, and comprehension (15.5%). One teacher said they would “continue using the inquiry process,” “continue using picture books,” and “continue to encourage peer collaboration and reflection.”

Table 7 provides the themes and sub-themes generated from the responses of teachers regarding what they plan to do based on what learned.

Table 7. “I plan to...” Themes and Sub-Themes

THEME	%	SUB-THEME	%
1. Continue Using Specific Strategies, Practices, and Activities with Students	64%	a. Continue Using Strategies and Activities for Teaching and Practicing Discussion, Conversation, Inquiry and Thinking Skills	17%
		b. Continue to Teach and Incorporate Specific Reading, Writing, and Comprehension Strategies and Skills	15.5%
		c. Continue Using Strategies That Build and Encourage Student Interest, Engagement, and Ownership of Learning	10.5%
		d. Continue Use of Picture Books	10.5%
		e. Continue to Support Students Individually with Conferences, Direct Instruction and Teaching Tailored to Their Needs and Class Goals	10.5%
2. Continue Learning and Improving Literacy Teaching Practices	36%	a. Try Out, Explore, or Experiment with Using Strategies and Implementing Them in Classrooms Without COVID Restrictions	8%
		b. Improve and Implementation of Strategies, Assessment, or Classroom Practices	9%
		c. Continue With Teacher Resource Books, Professional Development, or Own Learning Process	12%
		d. Curate, Collect, and Look For Effective Picture Books, Mentor Texts, and Best Friend Books	7%
THEME TOTAL	100%	SUB-THEME TOTAL	100%

