

# New Mexico Curriculum Framework

## Language Arts

State Board of Education Goal: *Establish clear and high standards in all academic and vocational subjects and ensure that assessments are aligned with content, benchmarks, and performance standards; require alignment of school curricula with performance standards and revise on a regular basis.* (Adopted, July 1999)

This document groups the Content Standards, Benchmarks, and related Performance Standards in the language arts into three strands:

- **Reading and Listening for Comprehension;**
- **Writing and Speaking for Expression; and**
- **Literature and Media.**

The *Language Arts Content Standards, Benchmarks, and Performance Standards* has been designed:

- To describe the disciplinary content and skills students should learn at specific grade levels;
- To help teachers create classroom instruction and authentic assessments that address a substantive core curriculum that can be applied to student successes across all disciplines; and
- To serve as the basis for a statewide assessment of student learning.

The *Language Arts Content Standards, Benchmarks, and Performance Standards* is a spiraling framework in the sense that many skills, once introduced, develop over time. While the Performance Standards are set forth at grade-specific levels, they do not exist as isolated skills; each exists in relation to the others. These Language Arts Standards are for all students and use in all content areas.

New Mexico Language Arts Content Standards, Benchmarks, and Performance Standards identify what students should know and be able to do across all grade levels. Each Content Standard is elaborated into three grade-span Benchmarks that are further defined by specific grade level Performance Standards. They illustrate how learners at every level continue to build and expand their knowledge by using similar language skills with increasing sophistication, refinement, and independence.

Many of the performance standards in the *Language Arts Content Standards, Benchmarks, and Performance Standards* are unique to English language instruction,

skills, and ability. However, because these skills are essential to all content areas, it is the expectation that all students will achieve these standards. Thus, it is important to note that multiple assessments, including statewide assessments, are necessary to fully capture what students know and what they are able to do.

# Language Arts

## Guiding Principles

The following ten principles are philosophical statements about learning and teaching in the language arts. These principles are provided as a guide to the construction and evaluation of language arts curricula and underlie every content standard in this framework.

**Guiding Principle 1: An effective language arts curriculum develops thinking and language together through interactive learning.**

Effective language use both requires and extends thinking. As learners listen to a speech, view a documentary, respond to a literary work, or convey their ideas in an essay, they engage in thinking processes. The learning standards in this framework specify the intellectual processes that students must draw on as they learn through and about language. Students develop their ability to remember, understand, analyze, evaluate, and apply the ideas they encounter in the language arts and in all disciplines when they undertake increasingly challenging assignments that require them to write or talk about what they are learning.

**Guiding Principle 2: An effective language arts curriculum develops children's oral language and early literacy through appropriately challenging learning.**

Schools must provide a strong and well-balanced instructional program for developing reading and writing skills in the primary grades, with materials appropriate for their students. The roots of successful beginning reading and writing lie in oral language development. Most children begin school able to use their oral language effectively for many purposes. Teachers further develop students' oral language and strengthen their powers of observation and memory to help them acquire the concepts and skills essential for learning to read and write. Early literacy programs provide students with a variety of oral language activities, high quality reading materials, systematic phonics instruction, and opportunities to work with others who are reading and writing. Reading to preschool and primary grade children plays an especially critical role in developing the foundation for literacy.

**Guiding Principle 3: An effective language arts curriculum draws on literature from many genres, time periods, and cultures.**

All students deserve knowledge of works reflecting a literary heritage that goes back thousands of years. In each district, teachers must work together to develop PreK-12 literature programs that are coherently articulated from grade to grade. Schools should expose students to literary works about the many different kinds of communities that make up contemporary America and about countries and cultures throughout the world.

In order to instill a love of reading, language arts teachers need to encourage independent reading in and outside of class. Librarians also play a key role in finding reading materials to match students' interests and in suggesting further resources. By reading and discussing books and articles with their children, and by visiting libraries with them, parents and other family members can make reading an important part of home life.

**Guiding Principle 4: An effective language arts curriculum emphasizes writing as an essential way to develop, clarify, and communicate ideas in persuasive, expository, literary, and expressive discourse.**

The beginning writing of children records their imagination and exploration. As students attempt

to write clearly and coherently about increasingly complex ideas, their writing serves to propel intellectual growth. Through writing, students develop their ability to think, to communicate ideas, and to create worlds unseen.

**Guiding Principle 5: An effective language arts curriculum provides for literacy in all forms of media.**

Computers, the Internet, television, film, videos, and radio are widespread modes of communication in the modern world. All students need to learn how to be effective users of these various media for obtaining information and for communicating to others for a variety of purposes. Each of these media has its advantages and challenges, and students must learn to apply the critical techniques learned in the study of literature to the evaluation of film, video, television, and multimedia.

**Guiding Principle 6: An effective language arts curriculum embeds skills instruction in meaningful learning.**

In many cases, explicit skills instruction is most effective when it responds to specific problems individual students reveal in their own work. For example, a teacher may wish to explain particular writing conventions to the whole class, monitor each student's progress, and then provide direct individualized instruction when needed. In other cases, explicit skills instruction is most effective when it precedes what students need to learn. A teacher should, for instance, provide systematic phonics lessons in particular decoding skills to students who do not have these skills before they try to use them in their subsequent reading. Systematic phonics lessons are especially important for those students who lack "phonemic awareness," or the ability to pay attention to the component sounds of language.

**Guiding Principle 7: An effective language arts curriculum teaches the strategies necessary for acquiring academic knowledge, achieving common academic standards, and attaining independence in learning.**

Students need to develop a repertoire of learning strategies that they consciously practice and apply in increasingly diverse and demanding contexts. Skills become strategies for learning when they are internalized. For example, a reading skill has become a strategy when a student uses decoding for recognizing known words not previously seen in print, or looks up the meaning of an unfamiliar word in a dictionary. A writing skill has become a strategy when a student monitors her own writing by spontaneously asking herself, "Does this organization work?" or "Are my punctuation and spelling correct?" At the point that students are able to articulate their own learning strategies, evaluate their effectiveness, and use those that work best for them, they have become independent learners.

**Guiding Principle 8: An effective language arts curriculum builds on the language, experiences, strategies, and interests that students bring to school.**

Teachers recognize the importance of finding strategies that enable them to respond to the challenges of linguistic and cultural differences in their classrooms. They recognize that sometimes students have learned ways of talking, thinking, and interacting that are effective at home and in the neighborhood but which may not have the same meaning or usefulness in school. Teachers try to draw on these different ways of talking and thinking as potential bridges to speaking and writing in standard English.

**Guiding Principle 9: An effective language arts curriculum develops each student's distinctive writing or speaking voice.**

A student's writing and speaking voice is an expression of self. Students' voices tell us who they are, how they think, and the unique perspectives they bring to their learning. These voices

develop when teachers provide opportunities for students to interact with one another, to explore each other's ideas, and to communicate their own ideas to others. When students discuss ideas and read one another's writing, they learn to distinguish between formal and informal communication and learn to use vocabulary appropriate to the audience and purpose. They also learn about their classmates as unique individuals who can contribute their distinctive ideas, aspirations, and talents to the class, the school, the community, and the nation.

**Guiding Principle 10: While encouraging respect for differences in home backgrounds, an effective language arts curriculum nurtures students' sense of their common ground as productive citizens in order to prepare them for responsible participation in schools, community, and society.**

Teachers are teaching an increasingly diverse group of students in their classrooms. Taking advantage of this diversity, teachers carefully choose literature and guide discussions about the extraordinary variety of peoples around the world and their different beliefs, stories, and traditions. At the same time, they help each generation of students rediscover common ground as they prepare to become self-governing citizens of the United States of America. A language arts curriculum can serve as a unifying force in New Mexico schools and society.

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