Effective Secondary Class-Wide Instruction: Leveraging Teacher Leadership for Success

MiMTSS Technical Assistance Center

Session Resources

Dr. Julie Burtscher Brown

Introductions

Vocation	Vocation	Avocations
MOUNTAIN VIEWS SUPERVISORY UNION	Project for Adolescent Literacy	
PK–12 Literacy Facilitator Mountain Views Supervisory • Secondary Special Educator • MLL Teacher and Coordinator • Literacy Specialist, PK–12	Founding Member Project for Adolescent Literacy • For educators, by educators • Teacher and student voices • Non-profit and open-source	

We're talking about …

Research	Practices	Systems
Explore adolescent literacy research centered on **universal instruction**	Identify **high-leverage practices** with evidence of effectiveness as **starting points**	Consider structures to support a culture of **continuous improvement and collective efficacy**

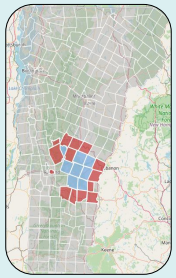
We're talking about …



… from a real secondary school

Woodstock Union High School and Middle School, VT

- Rural school in eastern Vermont
- ~ 450 Students, Grades 7-12
- 13 towns represented
- 27% of students free/reduced lunch
- 86% participation in after-school activities
- Learn more about WUHSMS on our website



… from a real secondary school

With real strengths

- Outstanding faculty
- PoG, Deeper Learning, Standards-based grading
- Community internships
- Agriculture, language, STEM, performing arts, AP classes
- Academic and SEL supports
- Athletics and after-school
- Phone-free bell-to-bell
- And many more …

Consider *your* strengths …

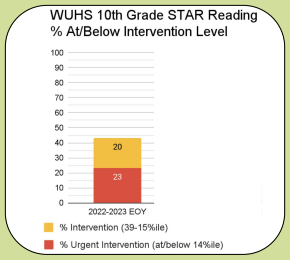


Image Source: The Guardian (2022)

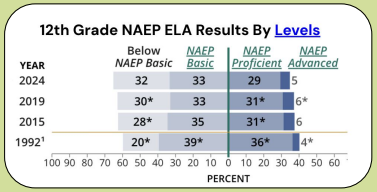
… from a real secondary school

Are there struggling readers in your setting, too?

And yet …



We aren 't alone



(NCES, 2025)

We needed direction and a plan!

Consider: Where would you turn first?

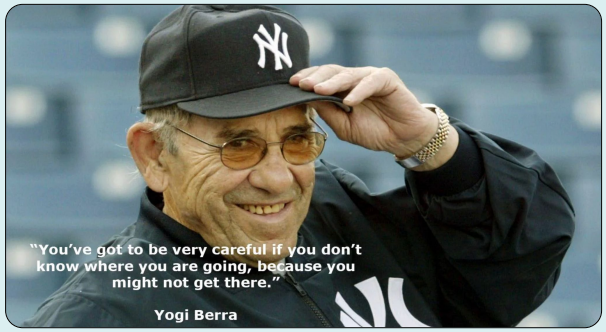


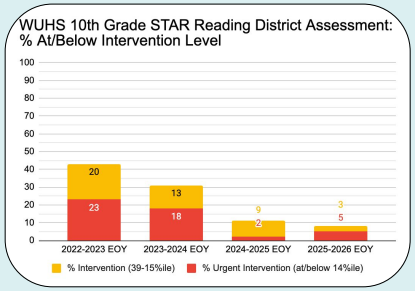


Image Sources: Poughkeepsie Journal (2015) and Google Gemini (2026)

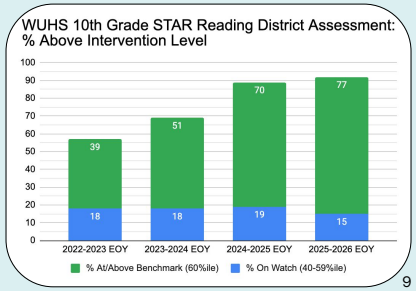
Trends

10th Grade STAR Reading 22-23 to 25-26

Focusing on needs here …



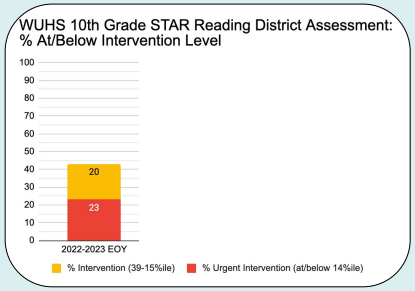
… led to gains in proficiency



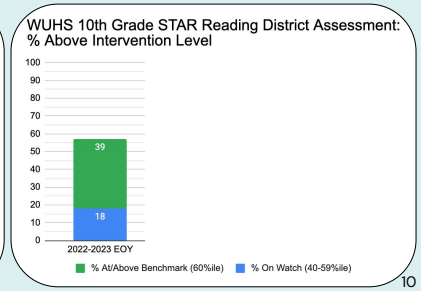
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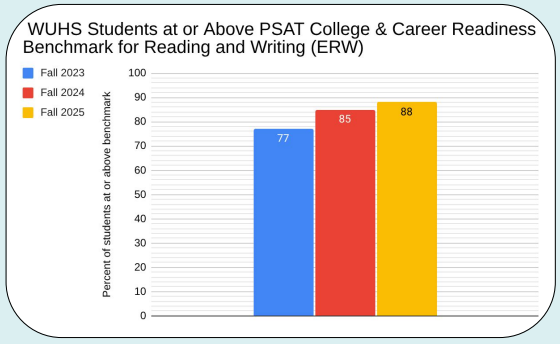


… led to gains in proficiency



The PSAT at WUHS

Grades 10 and 11 at Woodstock High School



How? First things first:
We started simply, even though the work is complex.

Want to improve literacy?

1. Superintendent who understands: **literacy *is* equity**
2. **Set *specific* goals** for literacy
3. **Get *everyone* involved**: teacher leadership

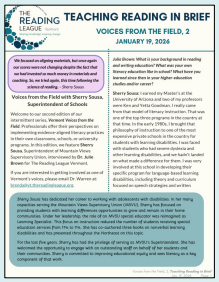
My take-aways from Kareem Weaver's MTR Keynote (2024)



Kareem Weaver
Co-Founder and Executive Director of FULCRUM

Image Source: Memphis Literacy Conference

1. Leadership


THE READING LEAGUE

TEACHING READING IN BRIEF

VOICES FROM THE FIELD, 2

JANUARY 19, 2026

"We focused on aligning materials, but once again, our scores were not changing despite the fact that we had invested so much money in materials and coaching. So, we tried again, this time following the science of reading." – Sherry Sousa

Voices from the Field with Sherry Sousa, Superintendent of Schools

Welcome to our second edition of our newsletter series, **Vermont Voices from the Field**. Professionals offer their perspectives on implementing evidence-aligned literacy practices in their systems, schools, and classrooms. Our first interview in this edition features **Sherry Sousa**, Superintendent of Mountain Views Supervisory Union, interviewed by **Dr. Julie Brown** for The Reading League Vermont.

If you are interested in getting involved as one of Vermont's voices, please email Dr. Warren at brandalyn.f.thorne@vermont.edu

Sherry Sousa has dedicated her career to working with adolescents with disabilities. In her many capacities serving the Mountain Views Supervisory Union (MSVU), Sherry has focused on providing students with learning differences opportunities to grow and remain in their home communities. Under her leadership, the role of an MVSU special educator was reimagined to include specialists in literacy, math, behavior, and transition, ensuring a full continuum of special education services from 7th to 12th. She has co-authored three books on researched-based learning disabilities and has presented throughout the Northeast on this topic.

For the last five years, Sherry has had the privilege of serving as MVSU's Superintendent. She has welcomed the opportunity to engage with an outstanding staff on behalf of her students and their communities. Sherry is committed to improving educational equity and sees literacy as a key component of that work.

Julie Brown: What is your background in reading and writing education? What was your own literacy education like in school? What have you learned since then in your higher education studies and/or career?

Sherry Sousa: I earned my Master's at the University of Arizona and two of my professors were Kim and Yetta Goodman. I really came from that model of literacy instruction. That was one of the top three programs in the country at the time. I taught there for a few years. My philosophy of instruction is one of the most expensive private schools in the country for students with learning disabilities. I was faced with students who had severe dyslexia and often learning disabilities, and we hadn't landed on what made a difference for them. I was very involved at this school in developing their specific program for language-based learning disabilities. Learning these principles and foundations carried us through and then...

"... once again our scores were not changing despite the fact that we had invested so much money in materials and coaching.

So, we tried again, this time following the science of reading."

Sherry Sousa, MVSU Superintendent (TRL VT, 2026)



1. Leadership

Phew! You 're in the right network!

Key research themes we considered:

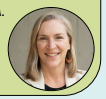
- **Foundational skills:** common challenge (Clemens et al., 2017)
- **Content-area literacy instruction:** improves outcomes (Gutierrez de Blume et al., 2021)
- **Reading volume:** improves outcomes (Sutherland et al., 2023)
  - Adolescents **not reading** often in class (Stark et al., 2023)
- **EBPs in Tier 1** (Wexler et al., 2023)
- **Collective efficacy and systems change** (Ferguson et al., 2010)

2. Set specific goals

Leading the work. *To where?*

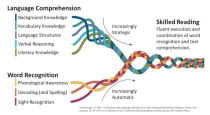
Set *specific* goals for literacy together.

*Written by teacher leaders and **Jennifer Settle, EdD,** MVSU Director of CIA.*



Big Picture for Literacy at MVSU

Created by the 2021-22 Supervisory Union Equity and Coherence Working Group with feedback opportunities from all stakeholders



Our Common Value:

Success in reading is an issue of equity.

We are committed to ensuring equity so our students grow to love reading and experience their highest potential through literacy instruction grounded in evidence-based practices.

Our Overarching Goals:

Upon the implementation of practice changes

- 80% of Mountain Views' students are proficient in reading* through Universal Tier 1 Core Instruction.
- 90% of Mountain Views' students are proficient or above in reading by the end of Grade 3rd and remain proficient or above beyond Grade 3.

Our Approach:

- Research and evidence-based literacy practices drive our professional learning, interventions, instruction, curriculum and assessment decisions.
- Excellent Universal Tier 1 Core Instruction meets the needs of most students.
- Universal Design for Learning is a framework applied to all instructional planning, ensuring prevention through instruction before intervention as well as engagement and relevance for students.
- Reliable, actionable data are regularly collected, and results are accessible and referenced for schoolwide decisions and classroom instruction.
- Skilled Interventionists and Special Educators support tiered instruction aligned with the core curriculum.
- Systemic and ongoing evidence-based professional learning for educators.
- Build student knowledge of the world through the integration of literacy with content from a variety of content areas and cultures.

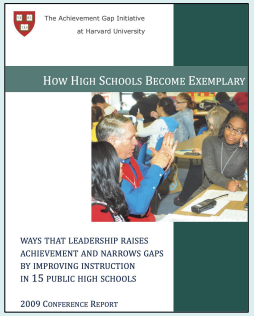
Further Clarification, Citations, and Definitions:

* Reading proficiency includes aspects of Word Recognition (decoding, phonological awareness, sight recognition) as well as Language Comprehension (vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, language structures, literacy knowledge, and verbal reasoning).

** Narrowing the 3rd Grade Reading Gap (EAB, 2019); Third Grade Reading Success Matters (Children's Reading Foundation, n.d.)

3. Get everyone involved

Our main barrier and the focal point of this presentation.


The Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University

How High Schools Become Exemplary

WAYS THAT LEADERSHIP RAISES ACHIEVEMENT AND NARROWS GAPS BY IMPROVING INSTRUCTION IN 15 PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

2009 Conference Report

Student achievement rose "when **leadership teams** focused relentlessly on improving the **quality of instruction** ... and implemented in ways that engaged their **whole faculties**"
(Ferguson et al., 2010, p. v).



What were our barriers?

How to "get everyone involved? "

We had real obstacles to getting everyone involved:

1. Lack of a shared **whole-school vision** to intervene for striving readers
2. Teachers' and leaders' **unfinished learning** around evidence-based instruction across content areas
3. Missing a framework for **teacher-leadership** for literacy across content areas

17

Consider your barriers

Let's discuss



What are the main barriers to getting everyone involved with improving secondary literacy in *your* setting?

18

Educator knowledge of systemic solutions



Image source: Tenor

What's the goal?
Why isn't the work working?

19

Educator knowledge of systemic solutions



Image source: Tenor

We recognized: Tier 2 and 3 "pull-out" interventions cannot bail us out when too many of our students are below proficient!

Time for a reframe:
Intervene as an action, not a place, and beginning in Tier 1

"To intervene" = To act to prevent or alter a predictable course of events

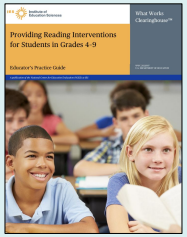
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Educator knowledge of secondary literacy


Grades 5-12 Literacy Professional Learning - 2023-2024
Supporting Adolescent Literacy and MTSS with Evidence-Based Practices
Mountain Views Supervisory Union, Mountainside, VT

Day	Outline of Topics
Day 1	**The Foundations: What Skills and Knowledge Does a Reader Need for Comprehension?** → Understand the sources of reading difficulties and how they impact older students → Appreciate the connection between literacy and language → Simple View of Reading, The Matthew Effect, What Reading Does for the Mind → **Action Items for Next Meeting** ◆ Come back prepared to share your insights
Day 2	**Word Recognition and Reading Fluency Part I** → IES Practice Guide Recommendation 1 Complex Multisyllabic Words and Recommendation 3, Part A1 → Understand how foundational reading skills impact comprehension → Routines to support the continuous development of text-level reading with grade-level, complex texts → Research-based ways to assess and text-level difficulties with accuracy and fluency → **Action Items for Next Meeting** ◆ Try the fluency screener with two students ◆ Begin practicing simple word-level instructional routines such as previewing multisyllabic words, scooping into syllables, and reading aloud ◆ Return in December prepared to share insights or routines
Day 3	**Word Recognition and Reading Fluency Part II** → IES Practice Guide Recommendation 2 Building Fluency → Fluency as accuracy, prosody, and pacing to support comprehension → How to use IES Practice Guide to development of accuracy & fluency with grade-level texts → **Action Items for Next Meeting** ◆ Continue incorporating word-level and fluency instructional routines ◆ Return ready to share your experiences and refine protocols ◆ Bring a text (paper or digital) that you will be using in the coming weeks in your class
Day 4	**Building Comprehension Part I: Word and Word Knowledge** → IES Practice Guide Recommendation 3 Building Comprehension → Appreciate how vocabulary and knowledge are tightly linked to comprehension → How connote strategies for vocabulary learning growth in both vocabulary and knowledge → **Action Items for Next Meeting** ◆ Begin practicing word and world knowledge building routines ◆ Continue weaving in accuracy and fluency with text reading
Day 5	**Building Comprehension Part II: Routines to Support Reading Comprehension** → IES Practice Guide Recommendation 3 Building Comprehension ◆ Part B: Questioning: Consistently provide students with opportunities to ask and answer questions of varying complexity in all content areas ◆ Part C: Teach students a routine for determining the gist of a short section of text ◆ Part D: Teach students to monitor their comprehension as they read → **Action Items for Next Meeting** ◆ Begin intentional practice with questioning, gisting, and monitoring routines ◆ Begin practicing collaboration with accuracy, fluency and word and world knowledge-building
Day 6	**Complex Texts for All Students** → IES Practice Guide Recommendation 4 Complex Texts ◆ Scaffolding up access for all students ◆ Lexile Levels: What, why, and how for informing instruction → **Action Items** ◆ Critiquing our district's adolescent literacy platform ◆ Planning for successful implementation at class, department, school, & district levels

Julie Burnichon Brown, MVSU Literacy Facilitator, julie.brown@mountainviews.org



Practice recommendation

1. Build students' decoding skills so they can read complex multisyllabic words.
2. Provide purposeful fluency-building activities to help students read effortlessly.
3. Routinely use a set of comprehension-building practices to help students make sense of the text.
4. Provide students with opportunities to practice making sense of stretch text (i.e., challenging text) that will expose them to complex ideas and information.

MVSU-designed 45-hour course on supporting secondary striving readers at Tier 1

Based on an IES Practice Guide (Vaughn et al., 2022)

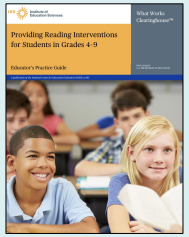
Educator knowledge of secondary literacy

Explained in more detail by MVSU teachers here.


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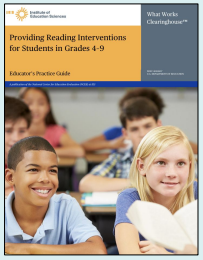


Teachers said, **"We can make a big difference for our students if we make a few small changes together."**

Foundation of our school -wide vision

Explained in more detail by MVSU teachers here.

To "Intervene"



(Vaughn et al., 2022)

Practice multisyllabic word reading

Provide purposeful fluency practice

Build word & world knowledge with complex texts

Across content areas, connected to deep content-area learning

How did we empower a team of teacher leaders?

✅ We **identified obstacles** to getting everyone involved

✅ We built **educators'** and **leaders'** knowledge

3 We **empowered** a team of **teacher leaders**

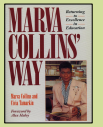
4 We continually **refine** and **develop** our **actions**

How to scale our vision?

We needed a model to show the way.

"It's easier to create legends and super heroes than it is to **identify and emulate the specific policies and practices that led to success.**"

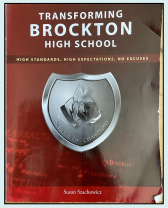
~ Marva Collins quote shared by Kareem Weaver (2024)



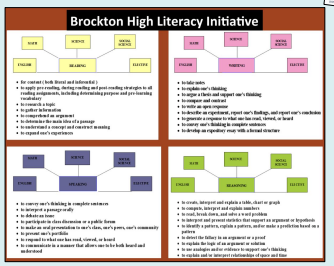
How to scale our vision?



← We needed a model to show the way.



(Szachowicz, 2013)

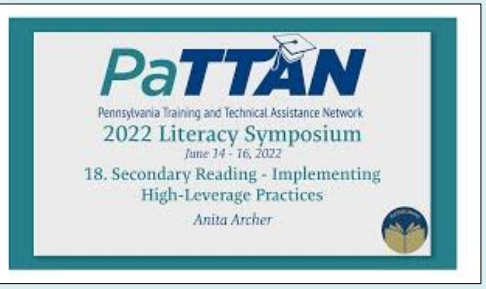




We built a whole-school team for literacy based on Brockton High School and Dr. Sue Szachowicz's model.

How to scale the vision?

We needed a starting point for everyone.



Every day, in every class, students read, write and speak.
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Dr. Archer (PaTTAN, 2022)
10:04-11:47

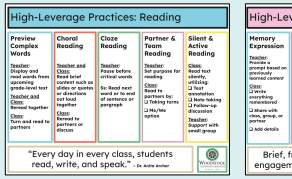
We started where Anita told us to. What do you think? *Doable for all?*

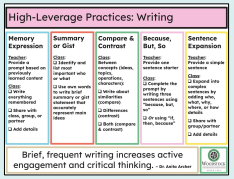
And, we got started.

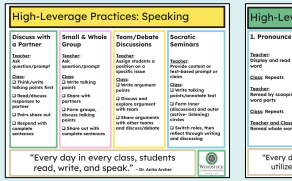
Leadership empowered teacher leaders.

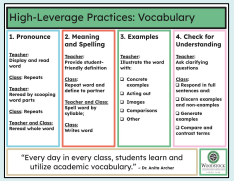
Reading, writing, and speaking workshops for colleagues

"Every day in every class, students read, write, and speak."
~ Dr. Anita Archer





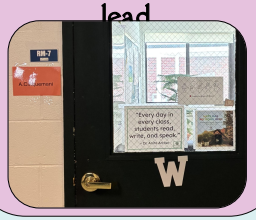




And, we kept going …

Leadership stayed the course.

Year 2: Empowering even more teachers to lead



"Go for traction."
~ Dr. Aaron Cinquemani, WUHSMS Principal



Teachers Teaching Teachers

How to include even more teachers?

When Teachers Teach Teachers, Teachers Learn
(Solow, 2025)

DIY TTT: The Cycle



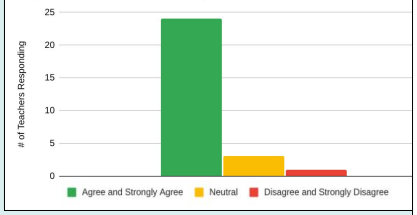


Teachers of Latin, Math, Biology, English, French, Spanish, Social Studies, AP Government, AP Science, Journalism, Wellness …

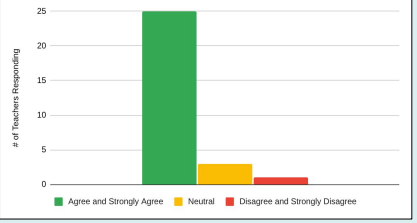
Teachers Teaching Teachers at Woodstock

EOY Feedback 25-26

The SLLC has supported the capacity of WUMSHS to implement our school-wide practices

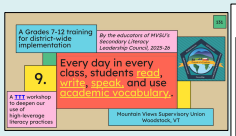


The school-wide initiative has contributed to our students' learning and increased equitable educational outcomes.



* SLLC = Secondary Literacy Leadership Council

"The most impactful and important professional learning experience I've ever been a part of."
~ Woodstock teacher, on the TTT format and our whole-school literacy initiative.



Could TTT work in your setting? Why or why not?

TTT Meeting Agenda and Notecatcher
Vocabulary

What	Details	Notes and reflections
3:15-3:20: Library	Welcome, links for teachers, framing the day	
3:20-3:50 **Rotating through 3 classrooms** **8 mins for each round**	**To begin, presenting teachers will:** 1. Name the routine, point to where teachers can find this routine on the posters and/or protocols *2. Briefly describe your purpose for using this routine in this particular lesson.* 3. Remind teachers to take notes on or pay particular attention to … 4. Play the video or teach the lesson **Then, participating colleagues will:** 1. Ask 1 or 2 clarifying questions of the presenter 2. Table discussions - Presenter circulates. Suggested Prompts: • How is this routine similar to or different from your current practice? • What grade-level texts or content resources could you use with this? • What effect do you think these routines will have on your students and learning?	**Notes from Round 1. Presenting teacher/strategy:** _____ *(Be specific—What did the teacher do and say? How might I apply this routine in my class?)* **Notes from Round 2. Presenting teacher/strategy:** _____ *(Be specific—What did the teacher do and say? How might I apply this routine in my class?)* **Notes from Round 3. Presenting teacher/strategy:** _____ *(Be specific—What did the teacher do and say? How might I apply this routine in my class?)*

3:50-4:15: Please return to the library after the 3rd round for department reflections and discussions.

How are we developing more opportunities for teacher leadership? What are some steps *your* school can consider?

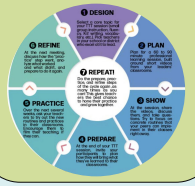
- We **identified obstacles** to getting everyone involved
- We built **educators'** and **leaders'** knowledge
- We **empowered** a team of **teacher leaders**
- We continually **refine** and **develop** our **actions**

WILD Group, WUHSMS

We're still going! Year 4 of our initiative: "Going for Traction"

When Teachers Teach Teachers, Teachers Learn
(Solow, 2025)

DIY TTT: The Cycle



WUHSMS Instructional Leadership Development (WILD) 2026-27

Vision Statement of WILD:

Literacy is an issue of equity that advances learning across the content areas. Students deserve teachers who are equipped with evidence-based practices to use in their classrooms. WILD will **strengthen** a school-wide culture where every student reads, writes, speaks, and develops academic language in every class, every day.

"It's simple, not easy."
Dr. Susan Szachowicz to WUHSMS educators (2026)



2026-2027 Goals include every teacher contributing, every meeting aligning

Microcredentials at MVSU

Microcredentials at MVSU



1. Knowledge	2. Implement	3. Share Practices	4. Teacher Leaders
Demonstrate **foundational knowledge** of literacy or math instruction **at MVSU.**	**Apply knowledge** to increasingly **effective** instruction in a collaborative learning community	**Synthesize** lessons learned; **Share** within and beyond MVSU to build a community of **reflective practice**.	Co-create a plan for sustaining the Microcredential through **teacher leadership**

Microcredentials at MVSU

Microcredentials at MVSU





Education Northwest (2021)

Implementation Practices

DEVELOP AND SUSTAIN A COLLABORATIVE TEAM
- Establish purpose and long-term goals
- Articulate and attend to collaboration norms
- Maintain an inquiry focus on student learning

STUDY RESEARCH AND APPLY EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES
- Explore research literature on learning theory.
- Investigate evidence-based instructional approaches and practices

GENERATE AND SHARE PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE
- Synthesize and document lessons learned
- Consider broader application for teaching practice
- Share knowledge with the field

Microcredentials at MVSU

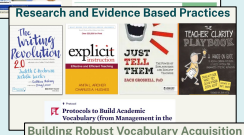
Microcredentials at MVSU



Research and Evidence Based Practices



Research and Evidence Based Practices



Protocols to Build Academic Vocabulary (from Management in the

Building Robust Vocabulary Acquisition within Classroom Routines

Lesson Observation Debrief Findings
Kelly Jean | Winter/Spring 2026

Focus- Vocabulary routines based in Science of Learning/Science of Reading

Goal- Deepen word understanding, increase contextual use, and build generalization

Product- Share low-prep, high participation routines that teachers can use across subject areas.



Overview

From Vocabulary Smorgasbord to "Retrieve and Synthesize"



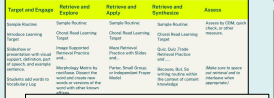
So many Routines and Strategies

Lesson Study 1

Realign and Reframe

Lesson Study 2

Flow of Vocabulary Learning



Key Takeaways

Emerging Themes Across Both Observations

Consistency

Reading, Speaking, Writing, Applying

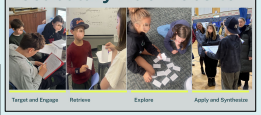
100% participation

Next Steps

- Which routines become core routines?
- What routines transfer across content areas?
- What balance of oral vs visual support is most effective?
- How can feedback structures be embedded?



Vocabulary Hub Website



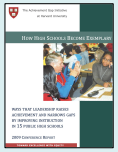
Target and Engage | Retrieve | Explore | Apply and Synthesize

Kelly Jean, M.Ed.
MVSU Grades 5/6 ELA Teacher

Our key steps for getting everyone involved:

- **Identify obstacles** to getting everyone involved
- Build **educators'** and **leaders'** knowledge
- **Empower** a team of **teacher leaders**
- Continually **refine** and **develop** our **actions**

What's next for Woodstock?



Ferguson et al. (2010)

HOW HIGH SCHOOLS BECOME EXEMPLARY

The stories that school leaders told were *not* primarily about adopting and scaling up programs offered by external vendors, though the schools did draw upon external advisors. Instead, the stories entail a series of decisions and actions undertaken over several years, sometimes as whole schools and other times as departments. Small but expanding alliances of leaders in these high schools undertook the following *five steps to becoming exemplary*. They:

I. Accepted their responsibility to lead the change process.

II. Declared the purposes of the work in mission statements that focused on a few key ideas and priorities that stakeholders could understand and embrace.

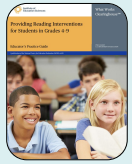
III. Designed strategies, plans, capacity, and incentives for broadly inclusive adult learning.

IV. Developed and refined quality standards for judging teacher and student work.

V. Skillfully and relentlessly implemented plans, monitored quality, and provided appropriate supports and incentives.

Key influences and affirmations

How it started



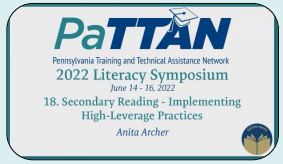
Vaughn et al. (2022)



Ferguson et al. (2010)



Szachowicz (2013)



PaTTAN (2022)

How it's going



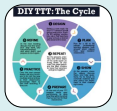
Frey et al. (2025)



TNTP (2024)



Shanahan (2023)



Solow (2025)



Weaver (2024)



Schopf et al. (2026)

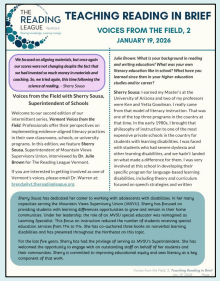
First steps trail map

What will inform *your* school's journey?

1. → **Leadership leads:** literacy is equity
   → **Set specific goals** together
   → **Everyone involved:** identify barriers, plan
2. → **Empower a team** of teacher leaders
   - **Begin** where Dr. Archer suggests: "___"
   - **Traction:** efficacy over complexity
3. → **Get started!** Every journey begins with *one step*



Call to action



"I want to inform superintendents, the AOE, and state legislators that **improving reading at a meaningful scale is possible.**

It is our responsibility."

Sherry Sousa, MVSU Superintendent (TRL VT, 2026)



To learn more about our MVSU literacy initiatives:

WUHSMS Tier I and Systems Change



Webinar with WUHSMS teachers: PaTTAN Literacy Symposium (PaTTAN, 2026)



With WUHSMS teacher-leader, Erin Hanrahan (Reading Realities Podcast, 2026)



Podcast about MVSU's Whole-School Secondary Literacy Initiative (SoR: The Podcast, 2026)



Webinar focused on research with TRL VT Ad-Lit Series (TRL VT, 2025)

WUHSMS Literacy at Tiers 2 and 3



Podcast with Melissa and Lori Love Literacy Podcast, Ep. 150 (MLLL, 2023)



Website: MVSU's Tier 3 Secondary Literacy (Brown, 2026)



Webinar with Pattan Literacy Symposium (PaTTAN, 2024)



Webinar with ORTIi's Virtual Reading Symposium (ORTIi, 2023)

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Note: Bolded references are freely available

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Thank you for all you do!

MOUNTAIN VIEWS SUPERVISORY UNION

Project for Adolescent Literacy
for Educators by Educators

Julie Burtscher Brown, Ed.D.

Session resources available here and →

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LinkedIn: Julie Burtscher Brown, Ed.D.

PAL: The Project for Adolescent Literacy

Please reach out with questions!