**Disciplinary Literacy Initiative**

**Concept Schools’ 2014/2015**

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**I. Background**

Concept Schools and Common Core expect that students learn to read and write in English language arts classes. Equally important is that they develop those skills, specific to the content, in all classes. This is why there are Common Core standards titled “Literacy for History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects for both Writing and Reading” because they recognize that content area courses must have the explicit teaching of reading and writing in them. So while English teachers are expected to go deeper with literature and non-fiction text, it is clear, that content areas must use content-area reading and disciplinary literacy activities as well. Even the Common Core Math standards (see pages 6-9) recognize that critical thinking, as well as speaking and writing about math reasoning and problem solving, require a disciplinary literacy approach.

**II. Content-Area Reading and Disciplinary Literacy**

Content-area reading emphasizes that “all teachers are teachers of reading,” and is characterized by generalizable routines intended to be taught by reading and content teachers. Many of us are familiar with this and know that it is the use of specific strategies to address reading comprehension. However, Disciplinary Literacy is more unique to the content teacher and is more of a philosophy/approach about how to engage students in the process of “thinking like a Scientist or Historian.” The following document has been honed to 4 pages with attachments from an extensive document co-created five years ago. There are more than 20 experts referenced in this document including Baker, Beck, Bloom, Coyner, Darling-Hammond, Dickson, Graves, Hirsch, Marzano, Shanahan, and Wagner. The literacy strategies are compiled into one document for ease but represent all the current experts in the field.

Chart based on work of C. Shanahan (2009)

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| **Comparison** | **Content-Area Reading** | **Disciplinary Literacy** |
| **Source** | Since the 1920s experts have promoted this. It may already be in place will need updating and synthesis within a disciplinary literacy approach. | Since 1990s experts have promoted this. This is the approach or philosophy that has emerged during the Common Core standards development. |
| **Nature of Skills** | Generalizable  For example: Strategies often in use today but placement needs to be rethought. KWL, SQ3R, word maps, Frayer Model, 3-Level Guides, DRTA, morphological analysis, summarization, previewing, brainstorming, note talking, QAR, and reciprocal teaching. Realizing Illinois is a compiled list of these, and all researched based strategies, already attached in all Concept English Curriculum and as a PDF here. | Specialized  For example: Consider the learning demands of a specific subject matter (e.g., Place the document/text information in its place alongside other concepts, historical periods, Science or Math concepts, or its development in time and place. |
| **Focus** | Use of reading and writing to study/learn. This tends to be about process but on the individual level. | How literacy is used to make meaning within a discipline. This is also about process but specifically how professionals in the field use literacy skills to make meaning. |
| **Students** | Remedial (or whole distribution) This the context within which schools should address RTI interventions. Tier 2 and 3 concerns will be well served by a Disciplinary Literacy approach. | Whole distribution |
| **Texts** | Often encourages use of literary texts – most schools, since reading is often taught most in ELA focus on literary texts which have their own text features. CCSS is asking this to change. | Only focuses on disciplinary text – meaning that content courses focus on the text types, structures, and features unique to their discipline. |
| **Role of graphics** | Taught more generally | Specific to the discipline |

**III. Attachments**

1. **“Disciplinary Literacy Overview of Suggestions by Content Area” (attachment #1) – will be referenced in the snapshots that follow.**
2. **“Realizing Illinois” – a synthesized document of Reading for Information strategies (attachment #2) culled from all experts into one handy document aligned with Common Core standards**

**IV. Snapshots of Disciplinary Literacy in action…**

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| **When visiting a K-5 grade classroom with a Disciplinary Literacy approach (based on what is outlined in attachment #1),**  **You would see...**   * Time spent with informational texts * A classroom filled with books on topics about insects, weather, energy, reptiles, the Civil War, geography, sports, and other topics that interest elementary grade children. * The use of thematically-paired story and informational text or several informational texts grouped in a thematic unit as outlined in the curriculum. * Graphic organizers related to informational texts and topics (e.g. K-W-L, Venn Diagrams, Semantic Maps and all detailed in the PDF called Realizing Illinois) * Explicit comprehension strategy instructions (See Realizing Illinois: For example, 2nd Grade - 3-2-1 strategy for identifying text purpose for 2nd grade identified on Page 26 of the table of contents) * Explicit vocabulary instruction (See Realizing Illinois: For example, using the table of contents Reading for Information Kindergarten - The Picture This strategy for vocabulary on identified on Page 4 of the table of contents.) * Writing to read and reading to write activities * Teachers and students using a core set of questions to guide discussions * A classroom configured to work collaboratively * Teachers using precision partnering (e.g. designated first speaker, sentence starters, accountable listening, and teacher monitoring) * Task-based accountability (all students must say, do, or write something as evidence of participation) * Everyone does everything, no bystanders   **You would hear...**   * Language talk * Student initiated questions * Vocabulary talk, specific to content * Academic language like table of contents, informational book, retell * Teacher-facilitated read-alouds and text-based questions * Use of before-during-after reading components |

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| **When visiting a 6-12th grade subject classroom with a Disciplinary Literacy approach (based on what is outlined in attachment #1),**  **You would see...**   * Teachers explicitly teaching and using generic comprehension strategies. See attached document Concept English Disciplinary Literacy Overview Suggestions. * Students using generic comprehension strategies when reading. (See Realizing Illinois - For example, Word Splash strategy about determining central idea and summarizing on identified on Page 2 of the table of contents.) * Teachers modeling and explicitly teacher discipline-specific comprehension strategies. * Explicit subject-specific vocabulary instruction. (See Realizing Illinois - For example, Vocabulary Overview Guide strategy about determining meaning of words and phrases on identified on Page 34 of the table of contents) * Multiple texts during lesson. * Teachers using precision partnering * Task based accountability built into every lesson. * Engaged discussions – no bystanders * Collaboration with other teachers/subjects * Strong literacy in middle school classrooms so that upper grades can focus on content.   **You would hear...**   * Teachers and students using academic and content vocabulary, questions, and content-specific talk. * Teachers modeling discipline-specific comprehension by thinking out loud. * High-quality discussions with questions like, what is the author trying to say here? Does this information agree with the other information? * Teachers modeling reasoning by thinking out loud * Students expressing opinions with explained positions and reasoning * Teacher acknowledging clear student reasoning * Teachers/students summarizing a discussion when it closes |

**V. Professional Development**

Since the CCSS says we are responsible for Disciplinary Literacy, we must all become familiar with the Common Core standards in our respected areas. Directors of English, History, and Science can all go right to the English standards (follow link <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>) where they are imbedded in the English document. Math is a bit more challenging as reference to the literacy issues are laid out on Page 6-9 in the math standards labeled “Mathematics/Standards for Mathematical Practice” and probably elsewhere in the CCSS Math Standards.

**Content Area Directors** – Look through the “Realizing Illinois” document and identify strategies that would be good tools for use in their content reading. They attach these to some of their units in SIS as has already been done for English. (See column one on Page 1 of this document) Then, each Director defines what is meant by Disciplinary Literacy in their content area and finds materials to include that help teacher develop this approach or philosophy as the CCSS outlines.

**Content Area Teachers** – Ensure that Concept Directors/Coordinators/Coaches know these strategies and can identify them when doing walk-throughs and evaluations. This will ensure that Content-area teachers are teaching reading and writing in their classes. What is explicitly taught in English needs to be, at least, reinforced throughout the school day. We provide professional development on the basic document, overview of suggestions, and the expectations we have (see snapshots) when we walk into their classrooms. In addition, we reinforce to Directors, Coordinators, and Coaches how important this unified message of literacy is to achieving the CCSS.

**Professional Development Needs** - To be effective Professional Development should be shared and reflect our common belief in the need for Disciplinary Literacy. Once Directors have selected strategies and ideas that fit into this outline, the Director of English will work with them to develop workshops that target the mastery of strategies that support this approach through modeling and practice. The Director of English will provide a one hour overview to target this model to Directors, Coordinators, and Coaches. They, in turn, present it to their Department heads how provide it to the teachers. Then teacher are prepared to come to PD in the Fall and know why the workshops above are needed.