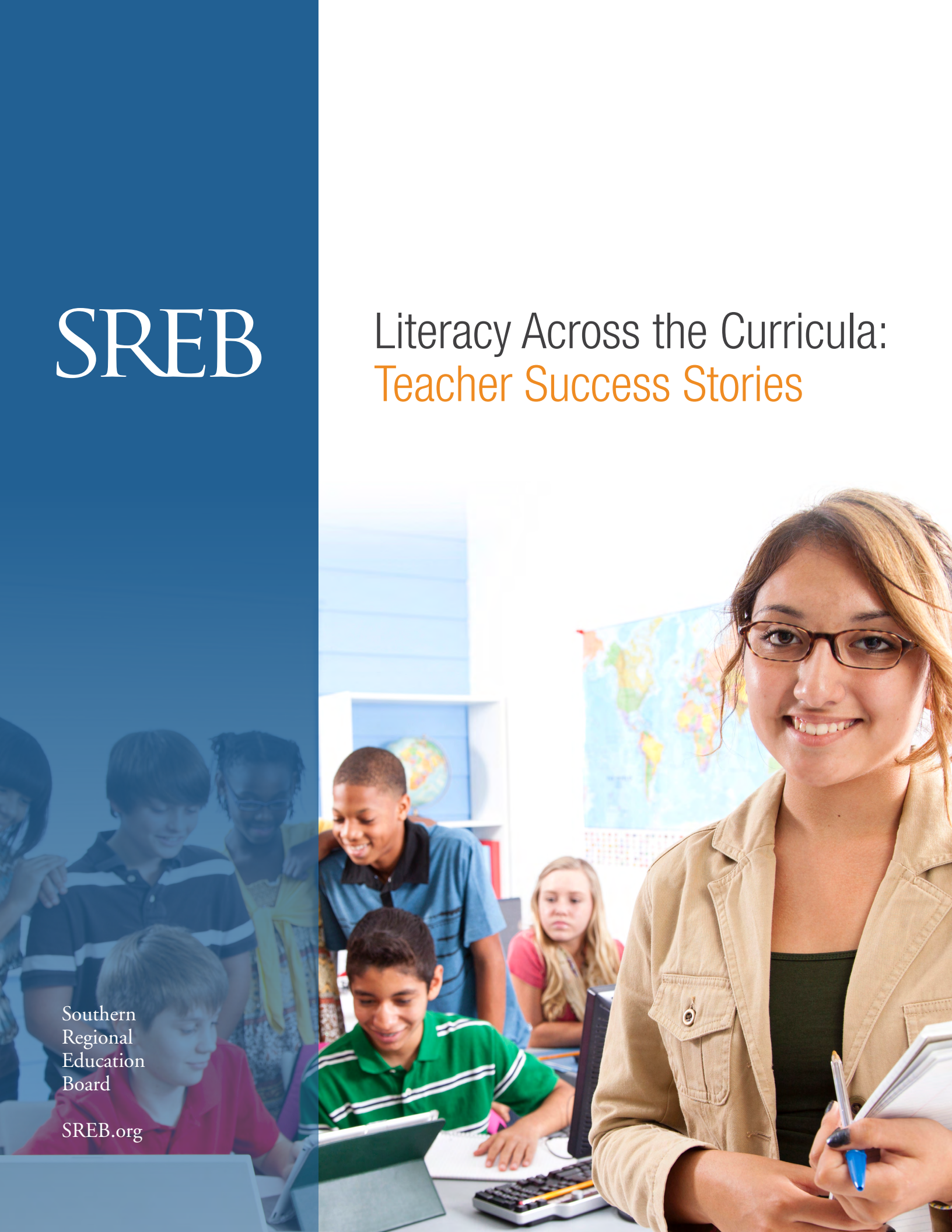


SREB

Literacy Across the Curricula: Teacher Success Stories

Southern
Regional
Education
Board

SREB.org



This publication was prepared by former SREB Senior Vice President Gene Bottoms, Lead Literacy Consultant Daniel Rock and Senior School Improvement Qualitative Researcher Joseph Tadlock.

The Southern Regional Education Board works with member states to help leaders in education and government advance education and improve the social and economic life of the region. Based in Atlanta, SREB was created in 1948 by Southern governors and legislatures. More at SREB.org.

Inside

Introduction	2
The Importance of Literacy.....	3
Closing the Literacy Gap.....	4
SREB’s Powerful Literacy Practices.....	4
Teacher Success Stories.....	5
Mississippi	6
North Pike School District, North Pike High School	
Rankin County School District	
North Carolina.....	9
Stanly County Public Schools, West Stanly High School	
Rutherford County Schools, East Rutherford High School	
Oklahoma.....	13
Sallisaw School District, Sallisaw Middle School	
South Carolina.....	15
Newberry County Public Schools	
Richland School District Two	
Rock Hill Schools, York County District Three, Sullivan Middle School	
Texas.....	23
San Antonio Independent School District, Fox Tech High School	
References	25

Introduction

Literacy is the foundation for success in school and society. An essential goal of every school is to help every student read, write and think critically. Dedicated teachers are the catalyst for reaching this goal. The Southern Regional Education Board developed a literacy professional learning model to better support these dedicated teachers — one of our greatest assets.

SREB's powerful literacy practices stem from and expand upon the Literacy Design Collaborative instructional framework. LDC is a vehicle for developing reading, writing and thinking skills within a variety of academic disciplines, not just in English language arts courses. When teachers help students become literate in their discipline, they ultimately strengthen students' learning of the content and the subject matter.

SREB provides professional development to educators in how to use these powerful literacy practices to change how teachers teach and students learn. These practices empower teachers from various disciplines — including English language arts, science, social studies and career and technical education — to collaborate, plan lessons together and create more relevant assignments that engage and excite students.

The teacher success stories in this publication illustrate how SREB partnered with states, districts, schools and teachers to immerse students in grade-level assignments that raise achievement. These stories also show how implementing this literacy model can be both challenging and rewarding.

These stories highlight only a few of the teachers who rose to the challenge and persevered. In the coming months, SREB will release a full report describing the experiences of these teachers, and many others, who successfully used powerful literacy practices to improve student literacy and content achievement.

For more information about these powerful literacy practices and SREB professional development, visit [SREB.org/ldc](https://www.sreb.org/ldc).

The Importance of Literacy

Strong reading and writing skills are essential to graduating on time from high school, achieving postsecondary success, securing a middle-class lifestyle and becoming an informed citizen. Students need these skills to compete in the 21st century and lead healthy, informed and productive lives. No matter the path students choose following high school, literacy skills will have a profound impact on their quality of life.

Despite rising graduation rates, many students are leaving high school without the skills they need to earn postsecondary credentials. Eight in 10 American high school students graduate within four years, yet as many as 60 percent are unprepared for success in postsecondary studies and the workforce, according to a 2017 report from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Scores on nationally recognized assessments like the ACT also show that students are graduating unprepared for college and careers. In the 25 states that administered the ACT to at least 70 percent of 2017 high school graduates, only 56 percent of tested students met ACT's college-readiness benchmark for English and only 42 percent met ACT's benchmark for reading, according to ACT's 2017 National College and Career Readiness report.

SREB holds that evidence-based best practices for improving literacy skills must be a priority for teachers

“To better prepare students for success and bridge the nation’s literacy gap, schools can no longer isolate literacy to English language arts classrooms.”

Sean Reardon, 2013

and policymakers alike (Graham & Hebert, 2010). As such, we provide professional development on powerful literacy practices that empower teachers across disciplines — English language arts, science, social studies and career and technical education — to design content-specific literacy-based assignments that engage students in reading, comprehending and analyzing grade-level disciplinary texts and expressing their understanding of those texts orally and in writing.

SREB's research in schools shows that teachers who embrace powerful literacy practices and create engaging literacy-based assignments can advance both student literacy and content achievement.



Closing the Literacy Gap

SREB has a long history of providing research-based literacy professional development that helps schools close the literacy gap and prepare students for college and careers. In 2011, SREB began partnering with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and LDC.org to bring the Literacy Design Collaborative to more than 800 schools across numerous states in the [16-state SREB region](#) and beyond.

LDC provides both a framework and tools for aligning instruction, assessment and curriculum. SREB's partnership with LDC has had a dramatic impact on student learning by setting clear criteria for what quality assignments look like and providing teachers with practical tools and strategies for creating them. LDC's process for nationally vetting assignments ensures that every student in every class implementing LDC is guaranteed to receive challenging, standards-aligned instruction that makes literacy a central component of learning.

Using key elements of LDC and current research on literacy-based instruction, SREB developed its own powerful literacy practices. These PLPs help teachers across disciplines integrate literacy in their curricula in ways that advance student learning. The practices involve setting and clearly articulating learning goals, using a variety of grade-level disciplinary texts to promote critical thought and discussion, and immersing students in extended writing tasks.

SREB's Powerful Literacy Practices

- Literacy-based assignments require students to produce an authentic written product in which they cite evidence from complex text(s) that are aligned to the depth of knowledge of content and literacy standard(s).
- Lesson sequences use explicit instruction to support or scaffold the learning of literacy and content standards.
- Clear and measurable learning targets are established and communicated to the students and assessed by the teacher.
- Literacy strategies or mini-tasks — for example, reading, writing, speaking and/or listening — are embedded into lessons to support the learning of skills and content.

- Discussion is used as a strategy to help students gain a better understanding of the topic before they begin writing.
- Formative and summative assessments are used in all aspects of the learning process.

Research syntheses conducted by Graham et al. (2016) and Kamil et al. (2008) show that when students engage in these kinds of activities, they move beyond simply recalling facts and applying basic concepts to analyzing and synthesizing information across multiple sources and examining and explaining alternative perspectives.

Studies like these show that when students learn at deeper levels, they increase their comprehension and can transfer learned knowledge to new tasks, thereby increasing their overall academic performance.

Combining writing and reading together in all disciplines enables students to develop their writing in diverse contexts. By practicing their writing skills across the curriculum, students have more opportunities to practice different types of writing. For example, in science class, students can write informational text about their lab experiments; in history class, students can write argumentative pieces about different historical perspectives. . . . The benefits of writing across the disciplines extend beyond the writing itself — writing can improve reading comprehension, critical thinking and disciplinary content knowledge.

— Graham et al., 2016

Teacher Success Stories

The following stories detail the use of powerful literacy-based practices that improve student learning. Such successes would not have been possible without the efforts of many classroom teachers, district and school leaders, and SREB literacy consultants.

The teachers featured demonstrated an unwavering commitment to integrating new ideas and strategies in their instructional practices. SREB would like to thank these teachers and the school leaders who supported them for their willingness to participate in our literacy professional development and improve instruction for the students they serve. This work would not have been possible without their efforts and support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Mississippi

North Pike School District, North Pike High School

English Language Arts

Rankin County School District

Instructional Coaching

North Carolina

Stanly County Public Schools, West Stanly High School

Career and Technical Education

Rutherford County Schools, East Rutherford High School

Career and Technical Education

Oklahoma

Sallisaw School District, Sallisaw Middle School

English Language Arts

South Carolina

Newberry County Schools

Instructional Coaching

Richland School District Two

Instructional Coaching

Rock Hill Schools, York County District Three,
Sullivan Middle School

Social Studies

Texas

San Antonio ISD, Fox Tech High School

Science

Mississippi

North Pike School District

The Best Teachers Grow Using Literacy-Based Assignments

Valerie Freeman successfully completed her National Board Certification during the 2016-17 school year. Concurrently, Freeman learned how to use literacy-based assignments as her school, North Pike High School in Mississippi, partnered with the Southern Regional Education Board to implement literacy-based instruction in every classroom.

Freeman asserts that the process of creating literacy-based assignments, scaffolding skills and reflecting on results contributed to her successful completion of National Board Certification.

As part of the requirements to become certified, Freeman had to describe a literacy-based assessment, analyze writing from two different students and describe interventions she made to address learning gaps. “I used the products from my literacy assignments because I could explain a clear process of setting high expectations and how I scaffolded interventions based on formative assessments.”

In one assignment, students analyzed different perspectives on censorship after reading a Nobel Prize speech and a short story. In another, students read seminal documents and stories from U.S. history and argued to what extent the texts represented the values of America’s founders. “These texts are all above grade-level. Students are able to read them because the literacy-based assignments gave me a process for breaking the text into chunks and teaching literacy strategies to help them access it.”

When choosing a lesson to videotape for submission to the National Board, Freeman chose one from her American history class. “Students were engaged in an active discussion about what they were reading, but it was structured so students had to ask questions, listen and take notes. Because they were interested in the topic and had read the material, they were eager to discuss what they read and respond to others’ ideas.”

“One of the most important elements of National Board Certification is being a reflective practitioner,” says Freeman. “SREB’s literacy-based assignment workshops gave me tools to reflect on how I teach and what students learn. At the end of each literacy assignment, our teachers analyze results.



Valerie Freeman,
North Pike High School

As a team, we scored student essays using a standards-aligned rubric. We charted how students performed for each section, determining who exceeded, met and did not meet expectations, and then we discussed how we taught and what we could do differently,” she says. Additionally, throughout her lessons, Freeman checks for understanding of literacy and content skills.

“Since deep reflection was embedded into how I was planning, assessing and teaching, I could easily describe this process and use it when completing my National Board portfolio,” says Freeman.

Student Growth

For Freeman, the results speak for themselves. “My students showed consistent growth both in their writing and on standardized benchmark assessments.”

“At the beginning of the year, our district assessment determined that 40 percent of my students were predicted to pass the state literacy test. When they took the actual MAP (Mississippi Assessment Program) assessment at the end of the year, 70 percent passed.”

Not only did exam results change but the quality of student work also became “more complete and thorough than prior to using literacy-based assignments,” says Freeman. The process made a difference because “the students knew

their exact expectations, saw a variety of models and had ample opportunity to interact with information and correct misconceptions before completing a final product.”

Freeman credits the overall improvement in student work and MAP scores to the SREB literacy workshop’s focus on designing quality literacy assignments, collaborating with other teachers and walking students step by step through the reading and writing process.

“At the beginning of the year, our district assessment determined that 40 percent of my students were predicted to pass the state literacy test. When they took the actual MAP (Mississippi Assessment Program) assessment at the end of the year, 70 percent passed”

Valerie Freeman,
North Pike High School

Rankin County Schools

Developing Confident Readers and Writers

As an experienced teacher and instructional coach in Rankin County School District in Brandon, Mississippi, Sheri Blankenship knows her way around a classroom. When Rankin County district leadership decided to partner with the Southern Regional Education Board in 2015 to use literacy-based assignments to improve student achievement, Blankenship was identified as the individual best suited to lead the effort. Her experience, knowledge and understanding of quality professional development made her an easy choice.

Blankenship has truly enjoyed the experience and credits SREB with equipping her and her teachers with literacy-rich strategies and assignments that have helped to spread literacy across content areas and enrich students’ classroom experiences.

In her role, Blankenship supports eight middle grades schools and eight high schools. When asked how the SREB literacy workshops have impacted her and her staff, she said: “First, and foremost, the framework has made us better planners. Our instruction is more focused, aligned and clear. The strategies we have learned for incorporating literacy-rich assignments have been the catalyst for helping our students master content.”

Features of Literacy-Based Assignments

Blankenship says designing units and lessons around literacy-based assignments has advanced students’ literacy and content achievement. Moreover, SREB workshops prepared her teachers to shift from lecturers to facilitators.

“Literacy-based assignments have helped students engage with grade-level texts in new ways,” says Blankenship.

“Before using SREB literacy resources, our students lacked the motivation to dig into complex texts. They

“The strategies we have learned for incorporating literacy-rich assignments have been the catalyst for helping our students master content.”

Sheri Blankenship,
Rankin County School District

didn't believe they were capable of making sense of these texts. But my teachers have learned that their students are capable of achieving at higher levels. Students have learned to be active, engaged learners who think critically. Ultimately we are helping to develop productive 21st-century citizens," says Blankenship.

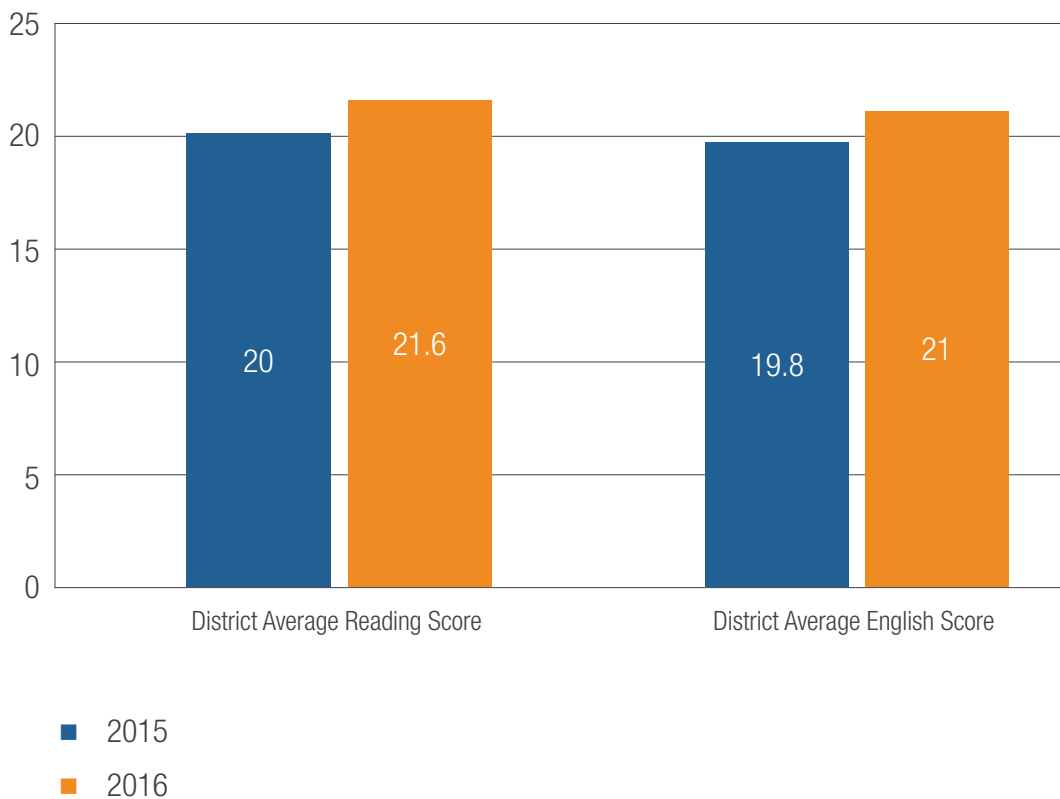
Blankenship also greatly appreciates that literacy-based strategies and assignments provide teachers with tools to teach standards to the depth at which they are written. "Now I understand not only what the standards demand of our students but how to put a toolbox of research-based strategies into action in the context of major assignments. Instead of teaching a standard here and a standard there and sprinkling strategies throughout, our teachers choose focus standards, write a literacy-based assignment [around

those standards] and determine the skills necessary for their students to be successful."

Once teachers determine the literacy skills students need to be successful on an assignment, teachers choose appropriate instructional strategies that build those skills. "Having a process for aligning standards, skills and instruction makes it easier to ensure instruction aligns with what students need to know and do. This makes it easier to identify where students have gaps in their understanding. This alignment process creates self-directed, confident readers and writers," contends Blankenship.

After implementing literacy-based assignments, all eight of the district's high schools saw significant increases in their average ACT Reading and English scores as Figure 1 shows.

Figure 1
Rankin County 11th-Grade ACT Reading and English Scores



North Carolina Stanly County Schools

Learning Not to Be “That Teacher”

“I was *that teacher*,” says Karen Brown, an interior design teacher at West Stanly High School in Stanly County, North Carolina. “The teacher who stood in front of her class, presented a PowerPoint and lectured students.” Brown nevertheless always considered herself a good teacher. “My scores were good; my students liked me. But were they really learning?”

Brown says the Southern Regional Education Board’s literacy professional development opened her eyes to what true student engagement means: **“Students taking responsibility for their own learning. It means actively reading challenging texts to learn information and engaging in critical thought and writing about those texts. It means students learning to work together, asking each other questions and creating a product for a real-world audience.”**

To illustrate the increased engagement that literacy-based instruction brings to her classroom, Brown describes a recent assignment on furniture design. Instead of presenting a PowerPoint on designers and having students create a model, Brown asked students to research designers and compare them in an analytical essay.

During an observation of this assignment, Brown recalls, **“The observer asked one of my students how she felt about her writing product, a compare-and-contrast paper on furniture designers. She said, ‘It was a lot of work, but once we actually got to the writing part, it was easy. We just put together everything we had researched.’ To me, that illustrates engagement.”**

Shift in Teaching

Brown changed how she planned to change how her students learn. **“My lesson planning has shifted from how will I present information to students, to how will students use critical thinking skills to move from shallow to deep, meaningful learning experiences that use literacy as a tool for understanding new content? I now teach interior design by teaching students how to read and write about disciplinary texts.”**



Karen Brown,
West Stanly High School

In another assignment, Brown’s students created their own color forecast for the design industry. Students had to synthesize their reading of current events to forecast future trends just like many professionals do.

Although this activity was challenging, Brown says, **“All of my students completed it with pride. This assignment excited my students because they had an opportunity to share their forecasts with friends and family — a real-world audience. This illustrates the value of literacy-based assignments because students researched complex ideas, read professional-level texts and synthesized that information into an authentic writing product. They created something new and real.”**

Literacy-Rich Assignments for Students at All Levels

In each class, Brown teaches students at all levels — from gifted students to those with significant disabilities. SREB’s literacy professional development gave her strategies to meet each student at their level and advance their knowledge. **“I have found that my traditionally struggling learners create better writing products since I began using literacy-based assignments. What used to be overbearing and daunting is now broken down into segments — allowing all students to gain the confidence to believe success is achievable.”**



Brown teaches students at all levels — from gifted students to those with significant disabilities. SREB’s literacy professional development gave her strategies to meet each student at their level and advance their knowledge.

“I have found that my traditionally struggling learners create better writing products since I began using literacy-based assignments.”

**Karen Brown,
West Stanly High School**

Growth Beyond Expectations

Over the past three years, Brown has exceeded growth in every class in which she has implemented literacy-based assignments. West Stanly teachers receive value-added data from SAS EVAAS (Education Value-Added Assessment System) that compare students’ actual performance on end-of-course and end-of-grade exams to their expected performance. Students’ expected exam performance is determined by their prior testing history — that is, how well they have performed on other summative assessments.

As Table 1 shows, for the last three years, Brown’s average student exam performance has far exceeded expectations, meaning students are scoring much higher on Brown’s summative assessment. Brown says, “I believe my students are learning more because of my use of literacy-based practices, and that is translating into increased achievement.”

During the 2016-17 school year, West Stanly High School introduced literacy-based assignments to one-third of its staff. By the end of the 2017-18 school year, the entire staff will be implementing both large and small literacy assignments.

SREB’s literacy professional development is leading to quality literacy instruction in middle grades and high school content-area classrooms across the district. Brown believes that support has helped **over 85 percent of teachers at her school exceed their expected EVAAS growth targets because their students outperformed expectations on their state assessments.**

**Table 1
Value-Added Growth Scores for Karen Brown’s Students**

YEAR	GROWTH MEASURE	STANDARD ERROR	INDEX	LEVEL
2015	4.7	1.5	3.1	Exceeds Expected Growth
2016	5.6	1.1	5.0	Exceeds Expected Growth
2017	3.0	1.0	3.1	Exceeds Expected Growth
Three-Year Trend	4.2	0.7	6.3	Exceeds Expected Growth

Source: SAS EVAAS data received from Stanly County Schools.

Literacy-Rich Instruction in Career Classrooms

Three years ago, Atoniea Boykins, a career management and Microsoft IT teacher at East Rutherford High School in North Carolina, took the opportunity to explore strategies for incorporating literacy-based assignments into her curricula. She saw her students' achievement soar.

Boykins was introduced to this literacy-based instructional design during a professional development opportunity with the Southern Regional Education Board. SREB's literacy workshops and classroom coaching emphasize the importance of teachers using effective feedback and questioning skills to help students advance from passive learners to active, assertive learners. **Questioning and feedback strategies also help teachers create learning environments that promote student-centered learning.**

All too often, teachers rely heavily on direct instruction and lectures. **When students are deprived of opportunities to grapple with challenging assignments, they become passive learners who are unable to persist through more difficult tasks.** SREB's literacy workshops focus on helping teachers harness students' mistakes and failures as important learning opportunities. Boykins credits SREB's professional development, collaborative meetings, observations and feedback with enhancing her ability to help her students reach their full potential.

Students Learning From Each Other

“Through literacy-based strategies and assignments, my students are learning more and becoming stronger writers as a result of working in collaborative groups,” she says. Peer collaboration is a key component of SREB's literacy framework. It promotes active learning and encourages students to not only assume ownership of their own learning but also help their peers learn as well.

Boykins' students have discovered that they prefer to work in teams and in a hands-on environment. **“They are more energetic and learn more from each other. They not only learn the concept of teamwork, annotating, breaking up assignments and collaborating about the topic, but they understand that it is about learning.”**

“Through literacy-based strategies and assignments, my students are learning more and becoming stronger writers as a result of working in collaborative groups.”

Atoniea Boykins,
East Rutherford High School

She elaborates: “I give them a set of materials to read that helps them gather information on the essential question. Once they've read the materials, they meet in collaborative groups to share insights — each taking notes about the others' understanding of the material. Students reread the materials with deeper understanding, refine their notes and start outlining their papers.”

“Good writing is needed in the workplace. But students must understand the technique of writing, and this is something that they are working on in the classroom,” says Boykins.

Boykins' students are discovering the techniques of reading, writing and doing research while producing a written paper on a technical subject. Their ability to express their understanding of very complex materials in writing is far greater than anticipated. “You have to believe this quote: ‘Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn,’” she says.

SREB's literacy framework puts the focus not only on reading and writing, but also on improving students' listening and oral communication skills. The framework provides opportunities for students to explore grade-level texts, discuss those texts and write about those texts. This invaluable practice helps students develop the critical literacy skills needed for postsecondary and workplace success.

Shifts in Teaching

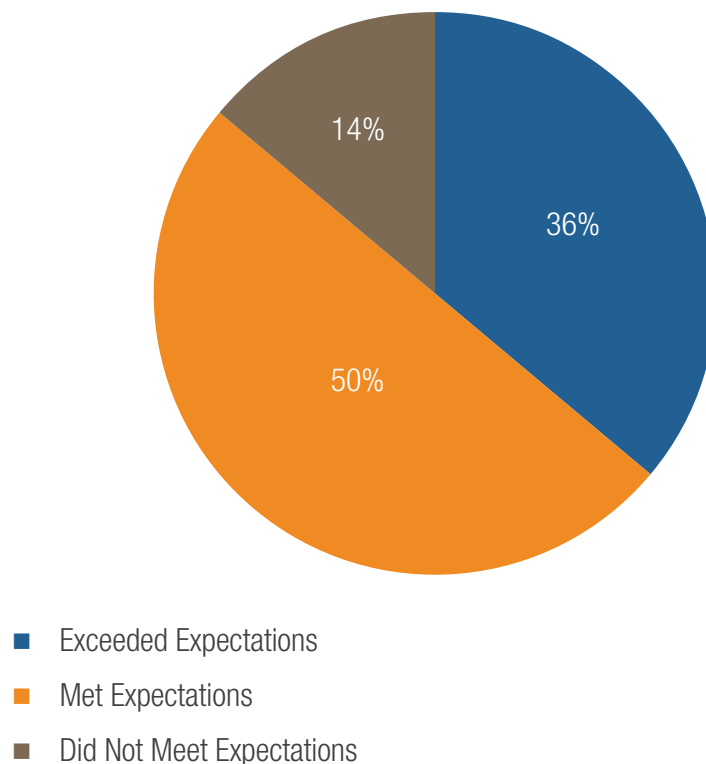
Reflecting on her evolution as a practitioner, Boykins recalls, “Literacy-based assignments have changed how I teach. Active reading skills are now a big part of my classroom learning environment. These skills help students to read and extract important information.”

“I start each major assignment with an essential question. I never really understood scaffolding or building on students’ prior knowledge. **But now I understand that questioning and feedback motivate students to think critically and dig deeper into their assignments.** Literacy-rich strategies and assignments have helped me pull together high-quality learning tasks while facilitating students’ literacy and content achievement. My students are more open to learning because they realize today’s 21st-century workplace is an ever-learning environment.”

Student Growth

Boykins has seen tremendous improvements in her students’ exam performance since adopting SREB’s literacy-based approach. As Figure 2 shows, **since implementing literacy-based assignments, most of Boykin’s career management and Microsoft IT students have exceeded or met their growth expectations on their end-of-course assessments** — a significant improvement from past years. Boykins credits SREB’s literacy framework as the catalyst that took her teaching to the next level.

Figure 2
End-of-Course Assessment Data for Atoniea Boykins’ Classes



Oklahoma

Sallisaw Public Schools

Diving Deeper Into Content

Before participating in the Southern Regional Education Board’s literacy professional development, Sallisaw Middle School teacher Brandy Reaves’ lessons did not connect to each other. As this District Teacher of the Year award-winner from Sallisaw, Oklahoma, explains, “My students would read a passage one week and write an essay the next on a completely different topic.”

“Planning and using literacy-based assignments have helped me to create units that cover a greater bulk of my state’s standards, which has provided ‘more bang for my buck’ as I teach students literacy skills and how to learn new content through reading grade-level texts.” **In her English language arts classes, Reaves now regularly engages her students in literacy-based assignments that push them to think critically and demonstrate their understanding both orally and in writing.**

One assignment Reaves created involves a nonfiction text about the Holocaust, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*. In the past, her students read the book, completed a study guide and took an exam. Reaves used SREB’s literacy-based instructional strategies to transform the book study into a multi-week assignment in which students apply close-reading strategies to analyze the text, discuss what they read and create outlines and drafts before they write an argumentative essay that demonstrates their understanding of key concepts and themes.

“I have learned more about my content because this process makes me closely analyze my standards and ensure that my assignments and resources are appropriate for what students need to learn.”

Brandy Reaves,
Sallisaw Middle School



Brandy Reaves,
Sallisaw Middle School

Students aren’t the only ones diving deeper into the content — so is Reaves. **“I have learned more about my content because this process makes me closely analyze my standards and ensure that my assignments and resources are appropriate for what students need to learn.** Not only are my students learning more, but I also have a stronger understanding of my content. Instead of reading a prompt, reading a couple of passages and writing an essay, students now collect and interpret information from various media, including videos, stories and news articles. Because I teach them how to break down grade-level texts, they have many opportunities to engage and respond to what we are learning.”

Beginning With the End in Mind

After two years of literacy support from SREB, Reaves is making the end goal crystal clear throughout every step of the learning process. “I used to teach the unit and spring the writing prompt on students at the end. Students now know what the prompt will be throughout the unit so they can consider their response with each step of the process. For example, the Holocaust module I created uses history to teach literacy skills through close readings, writings and discussions.”

Reaves recognizes that literacy assignments that focus on nonfiction have helped students learn new concepts and literacy skills at the same time. “The Holocaust

assignment is designed as a cross-curricular unit that teaches part of the history of World War II while building literacy skills for reading grade-level nonfiction texts.”

Teacher Support

Reaves says SREB’s combination of engaging workshops and classroom coaching helps her plan and deliver cross-curricular units of study while maintaining a focus on the standards of her content — eighth-grade language arts. Reaves says, **“Both the SREB consultant and the local literacy coach have made themselves available to us by email and both have been willing and eager to help at any time.** The local literacy coach also has come to my school and co-taught a lesson with me.”

This collaboration with the local literacy coach has increased classroom opportunities for independent learning, research and building reading skills. Some of these opportunities include reading novels and articles, marking texts and conducting research and writing independently. “This unit is something I have always taught, but SREB’s workshops showed me how to transform it in a way that maximizes student achievement and interest. The essays the students wrote were some of the best they had written all year.”

Because Reaves’ students have completed so many activities relating to the writing assignment before they begin writing, **“they are much more familiar with the content than they were in the past when they simply read a prompt and answered questions,”** says Reaves. Students who were poor writers are writing more fluently: “A fact I believe is attributed to the way I now structure the writing process. We spend a great deal of time on each step, and I guide them through each paragraph of each essay, which seems to have helped them become more confident writers,” notes Reaves.

Writing Techniques

Reaves has adopted the following techniques since she began employing SREB’s literacy strategies:

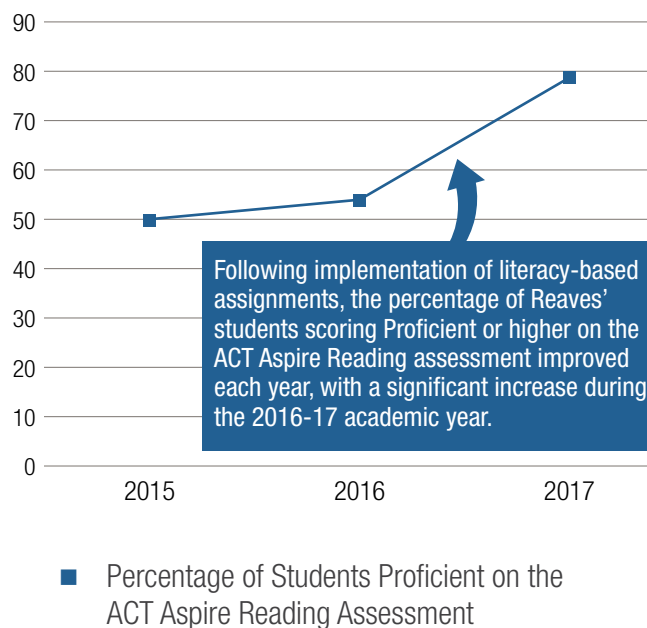
1. **Task Analysis** — Students now spend time breaking down the writing prompt (task) and making sure they know what is expected of them. Students do this *before* they begin writing.
2. **Enhancing Comprehension** — Reaves now takes time to find videos or other media to enrich the content. She has found that showing a 15-minute video related to the lesson increases student interest and comprehension. Students are more interested and thus more engaged.

3. **Marking the Text** — SREB’s literacy professional development helped Reaves discover “the ‘5 Ws/How’ text-marking strategy. Students must mark the ‘who, what, when, where, why and how’ of each text they read. They also use this technique to mark the teaching task,” she says.

In Sallisaw, the ACT Aspire is administered quarterly to help teachers determine to what extent students are meeting college -and-career readiness benchmarks. After using the literacy strategies and assignments developed through SREB’s workshops, Reaves has seen significant improvement in student proficiency. Figure 3 represents the percentage of her students scoring Proficient or higher each year on the ACT Aspire reading assessment.

Despite her success, Reaves believes she still has room for growth. She would like all of her students to meet college- and career-readiness standards. SREB’s workshops empowered her to use formative assessment data in ways she hadn’t before. Reaves now captures student progress in real time and uses that information to target student learning needs. Reaves believes this will allow her to better implement literacy assignments that deepen student comprehension and achievement. With Reaves’ growth mindset, the sky’s the limit for her and her students.

Figure 3
Reaves’ ACT Aspire Reading Data



South Carolina Newberry County Public Schools

A Literacy Journey

To meet its goal of advancing student learning and literacy skills in all disciplines, South Carolina's Newberry County Public Schools partnered with the Southern Regional Education Board to prepare all high school and middle grades teachers to use literacy-based assignments to increase achievement.

After nearly three years of support from SREB, Newberry County teachers now develop and implement powerful literacy practices in their daily instruction. Ongoing SREB professional development has empowered teachers to help students master the literacy skills they will need to thrive in college or careers.

A Different Path

Newberry teachers' instructional practices have changed dramatically since beginning SREB's literacy training in 2015. In an early workshop, after seeing what literacy-based instruction could do, Jason Long, a chemistry teacher, held up his lecture notes and end-of-unit questions and threw them on the floor, proclaiming, "My standards were not in those documents. I wasn't teaching the skills in that standard. My students were not learning how to read grade-level science texts. I'm not teaching this way anymore! I'm going to engage students to become active learners by using literacy strategies and literacy-based assignments!"

Kaye Jamison, Newberry's K-12 literacy specialist and Literacy Design Collaborative local trainer, has seen this shift across the district. "Students are reading complex texts and annotating with purpose. They are better able to express their ideas both orally and in writing."

"LDC has increased collaboration and discussion among teachers regarding how to deepen their students' understanding of complex texts. As a result, teachers have learned to model literacy strategies so that all students develop the requisite skills," Jamison says.

During her observations, Jamison says, "The students are the ones who are doing the work and the teachers are the facilitators."



Kaye Jamison,
Newberry County School
District

Bringing Literacy to All Classes

Over a two-year period, Newberry has grown its implementation of SREB's powerful literacy practices from 16 teachers in four schools to 80 teachers across the entire district.

According to Jamison, widespread adoption of SREB's literacy-based assignments requires four key components: district leadership, school leadership, embedded professional development and collaboration.

In early August of the first year it adopted SREB's powerful literacy practices, Newberry County convened district and school leaders to discuss the district's goal of having every teacher use literacy to engage students in content learning. District leaders then collaboratively determined the dates that individual schools would receive SREB's professional development.

Jamison then worked with a core group of 16 teacher-leaders and SREB trainers to produce professional development experiences for their colleagues. "Our goal was to develop leaders in each school," says Jamison.

"Based on each person's strengths, each teacher-leader had a role. For example, one teacher would lead the training, another would provide technical assistance and another would be responsible for communication and providing resources."



Jamison meets with students.

Using a schedule developed by Jamison and school leaders, content teams then collaboratively chose grade-level texts, designed assignments, selected literacy strategies and scored student work. “It was important that teams met by content area,” says Jamison. “This allowed them to dig into their standards and share ideas on how to use reading and writing to teach important concepts.” As the teachers implemented the lessons and assignments developed during these meetings, Jamison and school leaders observed classes and provided feedback.

End Results

Jamison reported back to district and school leaders about their progress. “SREB provided us with important data, such as teacher and student surveys, to help us analyze our progress and areas for improvement. Additionally, we used assessment and implementation data to assess the quality of our efforts.”

“Our plan works because everyone is taking responsibility for improving college readiness through improved literacy instruction,” says Jamison. “The original 16 teachers-leaders are now serving as leaders in the district, facilitating collaborative planning, co-designing assignments and leading professional development workshops. Teachers now understand the common goal because the district has a clear vision that is communicated by the principals.”

Newberry County has experienced significant, consistent academic improvement since launching literacy-based assignments. As Figure 4 shows, the six participating

teachers who administered the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment saw classwide student growth from fall 2016 to spring 2017.

Before these teachers implemented literacy-based practices, most of their students’ fall ELA, science and social studies MAP scores fell in the average to slightly below-average range. After implementing literacy-based practices, spring MAP averages for ELA, science and social studies scores increased, as Figure 4 shows.

Moreover, four of six teachers with South Carolina READY (SC READY), South Carolina Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (SC PASS) and end-of-course (EOC) scores exceeded the state average passing rate, while two teachers met the state average passing rate.

Data Reinforce Efficacy

Before Newberry County implemented literacy-based assignments, none of its teachers’ classes exceeded the state average passing rate. Figure 5 shows passing rates for students of selected Newberry County teachers who implemented literacy-based assignments with fidelity, compared to student passing rates for the state as a whole.

Jamison is excited to embark on the next phase as district teachers approach Year 3 of implementing SREB’s literacy professional development. “Our focus will be on implementing the powerful literacy practices,” she says, “assessing and revamping our instruction and analyzing student work. We are well on our way to full implementation of quality, literacy-based instruction throughout the district.”

“Everyone is taking responsibility for improving college readiness through improved literacy instruction.”

Kaye Jamison,
Newberry County School District

Figure 4
2016-17 Fall and Spring MAP Class Averages for Newberry County Teachers

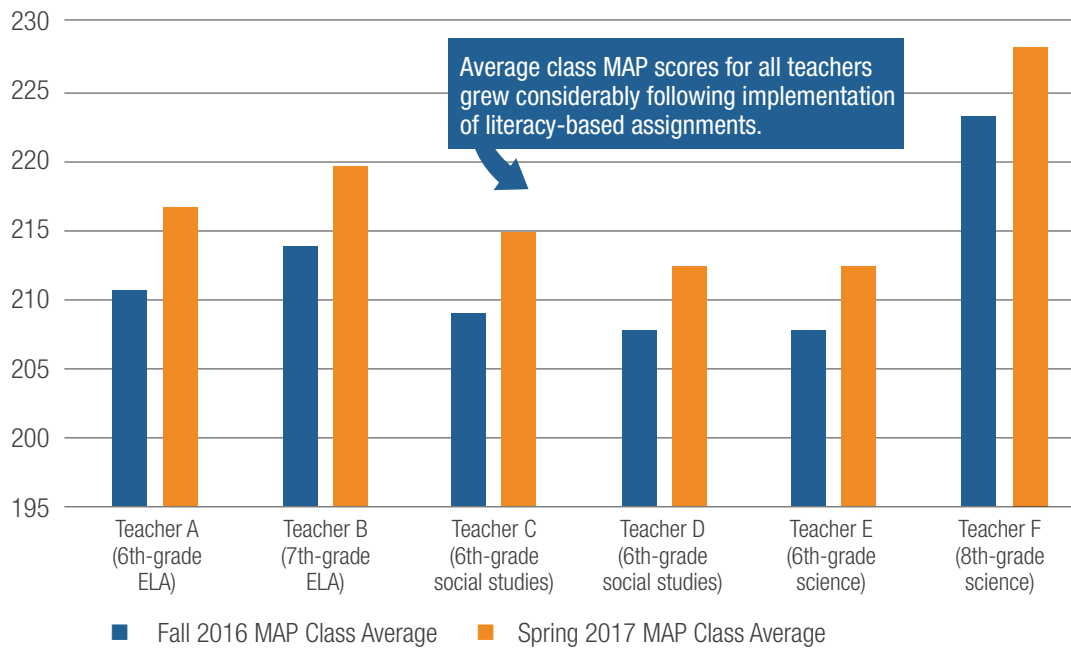
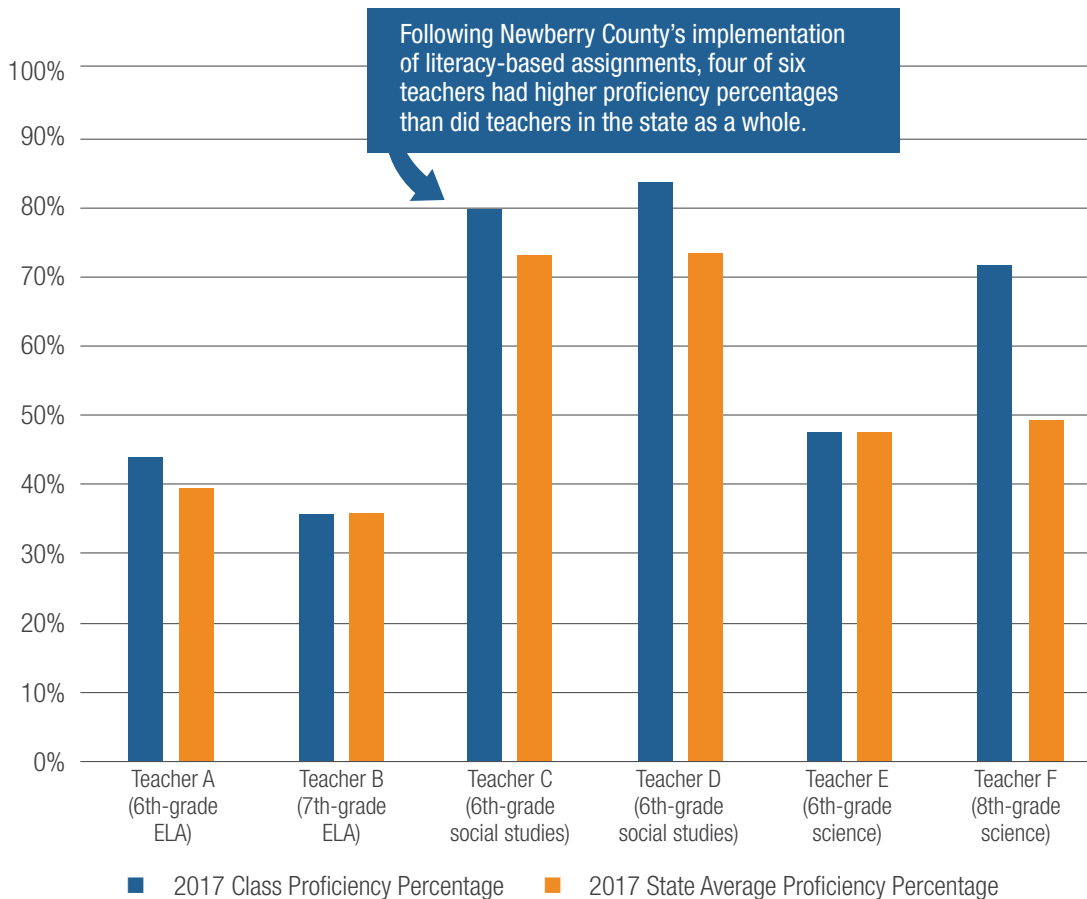


Figure 5
Comparison of Subject and Grade-Level Passing Rates for Students in Six Newberry County Classrooms Compared to Passing Rates for All South Carolina Students



Source: Newberry County School District

Richland Two School District

Teaching Literacy Beyond English Language Arts Classes

Marsha Moseley, director of middle level instruction in South Carolina's Richland Two School District, had a challenge and was in search of a solution. But she was wary. Moseley had lived through too many "next best thing, silver bullet" solutions. She hesitated when presented with the Southern Regional Education Board's professional learning model on literacy-based assignments.

After reviewing the research, Moseley recognized that SREB's literacy model was designed around research-based practices like backward design, teacher clarity, scaffolding and collective teacher efficacy. She decided to share SREB's literacy model with the seven middle grades schools in the district.

Professional learning communities, collaborative planning and teacher mentoring had always been a foundational component of Richland Two's approach to professional development.

However, Moseley found that SREB's literacy-based assignment professional development led to the purposeful inclusion of literacy by teachers in all content areas, not just English language arts. She also saw how well SREB's model aligned with South Carolina's 4.0 Teaching Rubric for Teacher Evaluations.

"During our training sessions, teachers started working across schools and as the year progressed, we saw teachers breaking into cross-district content and grade-level teams. **These workshops became powerful learning and planning sessions. Content specialists who were formerly unsure of their ability to shape and use literacy-based assignments emerged as teacher-leaders who returned to their schools and shared what they learned with other teachers.**"

In the past, Richland Two spent a great deal of its professional development time trying to convince all teachers that they were responsible for teaching reading and writing. Relates Moseley, **"SREB's literacy professional development created a path for teachers to learn how to support students in the application of reading, writing and other literacy skills to learn social studies and science standards.** When we intentionally plan literacy-based assignments across classes, we are moving toward a more perfect alignment with our state college- and career-readiness standards and offering students deeper engagement in grade-level assignments."



Marsha Moseley,
Richland Two School District

Purposeful Literacy-Based Assignments Across Disciplines

Alison Whisenant, a curriculum specialist charged with supporting teachers at Richland Two's Muller Road Middle School, has seen students take greater ownership of their learning since the district adopted SREB's literacy professional development. Whisenant attributes this growth to how teachers have learned to scaffold literacy skills in the context of large and small literacy-based assignments.

Whisenant says, "Teachers are able to quickly assess student needs by breaking down the process of reading and writing. As they teach these assignments, they are checking for understanding and adjusting how they reteach skills. Simultaneously, teachers show students how to properly question and hold academic conversations. **The literacy-based assignment framework has provided much-needed support to teachers who were unsure of how literacy fits into social studies, science and elective classes.**"

As Whisenant notes, "This process has empowered students to take ownership of their learning and placed them in the forefront. Teachers are acting as facilitators and not as 'the sage on the stage.' Cross-curricular teacher collaboration is also providing consistency for students. We are taking away the stigma that only English teachers can advance the reading and writing skills needed to achieve in any discipline."

As teachers implement literacy-based assignments in their classrooms, they have seen their scores on classroom evaluations increase because the practices developed in

“We are taking away the stigma that only English teachers can advance reading and writing skills needed to achieve in any discipline.”

Alison Whisenant,
Richland Two School District

workshops closely align with those on the state’s teacher observation rubric. Whisenant notes, “In the SREB professional development process, teachers not only receive face-to-face development but also experience focused classroom observations and conferencing that allow them to reflect on their instruction. Teachers are eager to have that reflection time and immediate feedback.”

“If an observer is looking at the activities, materials or thinking sections of the rubric, a lesson using literacy-based instruction hits all requirements,” Whisenant reports. She connects this result to purposeful planning. “Teachers are choosing activities that are rigorous, aligned and congruent to standards, provide collaboration, go beyond school texts and demand self-directed activities.”



Mark Sims,
Kelly Mill Middle School

Mark Sims, principal at Richland Two’s Kelly Mill Middle School, has shepherded the spread of SREB’s powerful literacy practices by setting goals, celebrating successes and creating a space for shared leadership.

“Our leadership team communicates the expectation to teachers that we will be part of this process. Administration supports teachers by celebrating progress, coming along on

observations and conferences and attending workshops that the school, district and SREB provide. **We know at Kelly Mill that if we focus and believe, we will excel and achieve,”** Sims says.



Rock Hill Schools, York County District Three

Student Success Begins With Literacy

Principal Shane Goodwin of Sullivan Middle School in Rock Hill, South Carolina, already had plenty of initiatives to keep him and his staff busy when he learned about the Southern Regional Education Board’s literacy professional development.

“We were implementing International Baccalaureate, a Next Level Grant and a language immersion program, working toward compliance with the Read to Succeed requirement from the South Carolina Department of Education, and tackling PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports), just to name a few,” Goodwin reports.

Nevertheless, Goodwin decided that the practices and support SREB offered were worth the investment in time and money. “As a result of this support, my teachers have grown as leaders and we have built a greater culture of collaboration around making literacy-based assignments part of all classes,” says Goodwin.

Social studies teacher Bill McHenry is one of Sullivan Middle’s developing teacher-leaders. McHenry says that using literacy-based assignments has changed how students engage with social studies standards, their classmates and him.

“Not only are my students becoming more knowledgeable about the content, they are also becoming more self-sufficient, more engaged and proficient in reading grade-level texts, and more capable of applying reading and writing strategies to learn new content on their own,” reports McHenry.

“My teachers have grown as leaders and we have built a greater culture of collaboration around making literacy-based assignments part of all classes.”

Shane Goodwin,
Sullivan Middle School



Shane Goodwin,
Sullivan Middle School



Bill McHenry,
Sullivan Middle School

McHenry says this change happens because SREB’s literacy-based assignment design embeds opportunities to modify lessons based on formative assessment. “This framework creates multiple opportunities to check for understanding as students learn the skills to complete the final product.”

Intentional Planning Leads to Deeper Understanding

To illustrate, McHenry cites how student discourse and discussion have shifted in his classroom since he began using literacy-based instruction. “In the past, my students would listen to me or perhaps do a read-aloud from the textbook or a primary or secondary source. I would ask a question and students would be directed to talk about what we just read. I was not teaching them the skills they needed to conduct an academic conversation about history.”

“Now, using the literacy-based assignment approach, I teach students how to read grade-level texts before we have a discussion by showing them how to annotate using a specific

strategy. Students next organize their ideas to process what they have read. Then I teach a discussion strategy that requires each student to contribute to the conversation,” says McHenry.

McHenry reports that intentionally planning a larger literacy-based assignment and thinking through the skills needed to read, write and talk about what students learn allow him “to be the facilitator — giving students the tools they need to read these types of texts and put together an academic response verbally and in writing.”

McHenry describes another example of teaching content through literacy, an assignment on sectionalism before the Civil War. “I used to spend two days on this topic. Students responded to short-answer questions about the North and the South from primary and secondary sources then put those responses into an essay. **I now show students how to structure their ideas into an outline, draft paragraphs that use evidence from texts to support a claim and allow time for peer review, discussion and revision.** While this takes six days instead of two, students learn the content at a deeper level. The difference in the quality of writing is stark,” says McHenry.

McHenry describes how in one of his old essay assignments on mercantilism, students shared quotes but offered no analysis of those quotes. “After going through the literacy-based professional development, I have students building claims about the impact of mercantilism and providing quality analysis and discussion in their essays.”

SREB’s literacy-based assignment professional development also helps McHenry teach the new South Carolina social studies standards, which focus more heavily on historical

“We now see literacy infused into every area of our school, science, social studies and electives.”

Shane Goodwin,
Principal, Sullivan Middle School

research and analysis skills over the memorization of facts and dates. He says, “Much like how science students take on the role of scientists or English students take on the role of critics, social studies students will take on the role of historians. **SREB’s literacy model is directly connected to college- and career-readiness skills and is a valuable resource to help teachers transition to these new standards.”**

Literacy Strategies Change School Culture

For Goodwin, the greatest benefit to adopting SREB’s powerful literacy practices has been the leadership development among his teachers. “This process helped us create structures for effective collaboration, shared leadership and teacher empowerment. It has gone from a few teachers attending workshops to a transformation of our school’s culture. New teachers understand this is how we teach at Sullivan Middle School.”

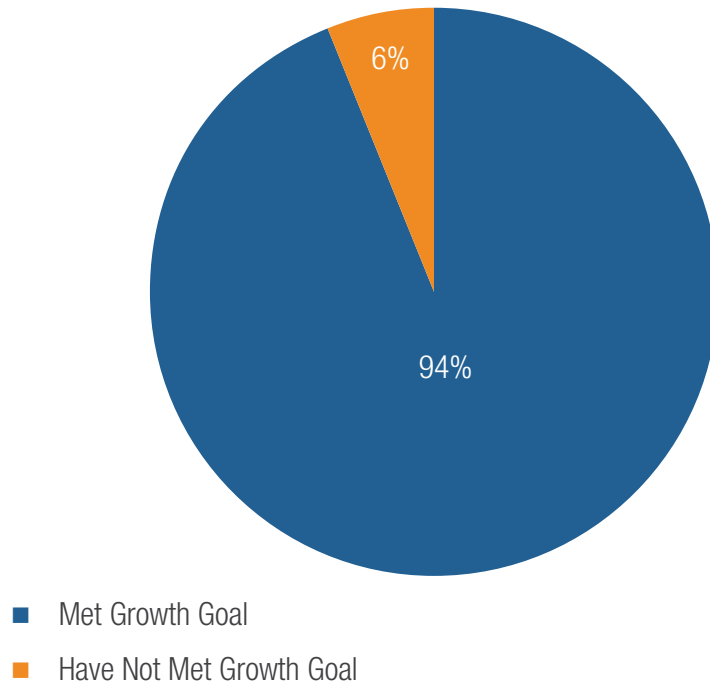


Goodwin saw this transformation in action during a workshop in which his teachers practiced peer-to-peer coaching to help them spread literacy strategies across the school. “I came to realize that adult collaborative skills need to be learned just like kids need to learn literacy skills.”

Goodwin and his team now prioritize literacy-based assignments. “We see literacy infused into every area of our school — science, social studies and electives. As a

school, we believe that literacy is about access to everything else students hope to achieve,” says Goodwin. As a result, students’ reading scores on the Winter 2017 administration of the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Reading assessment were outstanding. As Figure 6 shows, across grades six, seven and eight, 94 percent of Sullivan Middle School students who took the MAP Reading assessment met their growth expectations.

Figure 6
Sullivan Middle School Winter 2017 Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Reading Assessment Data



Source: Sullivan Middle School MAP Scores

Texas

San Antonio Independent School District

Science and Literacy-Based Assignments: A Perfect Fit

“Why on earth would I need literacy professional development.” That’s what Jennifer Lankes, a biology teacher at Fox Tech High School in San Antonio Independent School District, thought when first approached about participating in a new literacy professional development offered by the Southern Regional Education Board. “I’m a science teacher, a DNA and plant cells kind of individual, not an English professor,” the Texas teacher reflected.

After almost three years of workshops, classroom coaching and focused collaboration around literacy-based assignments, Lankes’ view — and her instruction — have changed. Lankes’ classroom now abounds with literacy-based assignments.

“As students read a chapter, they use an interactive notebook to take notes and graphic organizers to scaffold their ability to understand complex biology concepts. **Students go through a variety of activities to better understand the vocabulary from their reading.** To synthesize what they have learned, they write summaries of key ideas and concepts before using their notes, organizers and summaries to respond to more complicated tasks that allow students to apply what they learned,” Lankes says.

Before and After Literacy-Based Assignments

Literacy-based instruction is a significant departure from how Lankes taught in the past. Carefully planned multiple-choice exams were her go-to assessment. If well-constructed, the exams covered her content and could be graded quickly.

Through SREB’s literacy workshops, Lankes discovered that she was not assessing the deeper meaning and learning of her complex content or giving students the skills they needed to comprehend grade-level texts, like their biology textbook — she was only assessing surface-level learning.

Lankes didn’t know if her students were mastering specific skills because they were lucky guessers or because they truly understood the content. After shifting from multiple-choice exams to authentic writing products that required students to use literacy skills to learn content standards, Lankes discovered that assessing student learning and higher-level thinking was much easier.



Jennifer Lankes’ biology class

Lankes now knows what her students understand because they write about it. For example, Lankes developed a literacy-based assignment about cellular respiration after participating in SREB’s literacy professional development. “Students wrote detailed lab reports with CERs (claim-evidence-reasoning) that demonstrated their deeper understanding of critical concepts. **Assignments like this motivated my students to do more and think more deeply.**”

“At first, students didn’t want to put in the extra work. They wanted me to give them the answers. But as they adjusted, my students rose to the challenge and exceeded my and their expectations.” After experiencing success, Lankes’ students are now tracking their own progress and taking greater ownership of their learning.

Improving Scores Year After Year

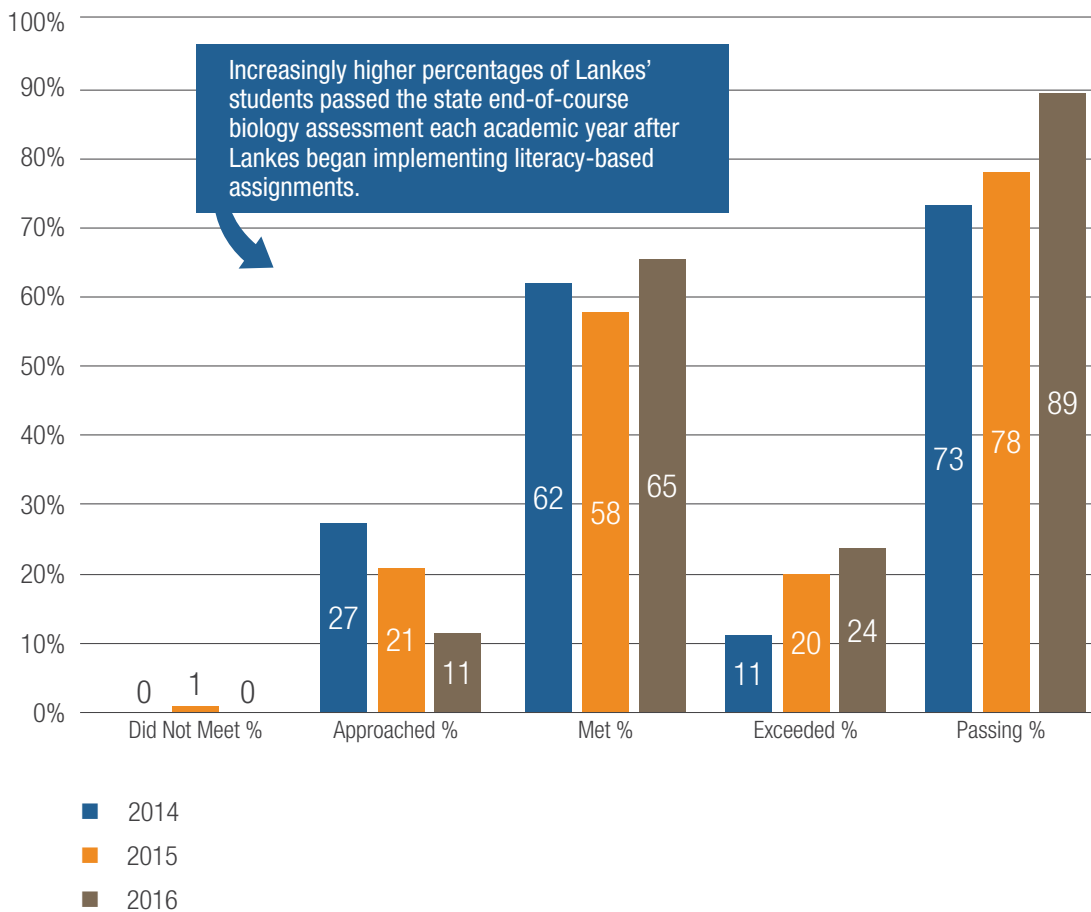
Lankes’ end-of-course exam scores have improved over the three years that San Antonio ISD has implemented SREB’s literacy professional development. The year before Lankes began regularly using literacy-based assignments, 73 percent of her students met or exceeded proficiency expectations on the state assessment. **After regularly using literacy-based assignments to teach content, Lankes has seen a 16 percent increase in the number of students meeting or exceeding expectations,** as Figure 7 shows.

Lankes summarizes her experience: **“SREB’s literacy training has made a profound, everlasting impression on my pedagogy.** I simply can’t ignore the impact it has had on my interactions with and subsequent expectations for my students. I can’t go back to just giving multiple-choice questions and being clueless when it comes to doing the best thing for my students. They mean too much to me not to continue with this framework.”

“At first, students didn’t want to put in the extra work. They wanted me to give them the answers. But, as they adjusted, my students rose to the challenge and exceeded my and their expectations.”

Jennifer Lankes,
Fox Tech High School

Figure 7
Lankes’ State End-of-Course Biology Assessment Data



References

- ACT. (2017). *The condition of college and career readiness 2017*. Iowa City, IA: Author. Retrieved from https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/cccr2017/CCCR_National_2017.pdf.
- Graham, S., Bruch, J., Fitzgerald, J., Friedrich, L., Furgeson, J., Greene, K., Kim, J., Lyskawa, J., Olson, C. B., & Smither Wulsin, C. (2016). *Teaching secondary students to write effectively* (NCEE 2017-4002). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://whatworks.ed.gov>.
- Graham, S., & Hebert, M. (2010). *Writing-to-read: Evidence for how writing can improve reading*. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellence in Education.
- Kamil, M. L., Borman, G. D., Dole, J., Kral, C. C., Salinger, T., and Torgesen, J. (2008). *Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices: A Practice Guide* (NCEE #2008-4027). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>.
- Reardon, S. F. (2013). The widening income achievement gap. *Educational Leadership*, 70(8), 10-16.

18V13

JUNE 2018

SREB

592 10th St., N.W.

Atlanta, GA 30318-5776

(404) 875-9211