



## Creating a School Literacy Team

### TARGET

Elementary ✓ Middle School/High School ✓

Successful schools are places where people work together as a team. To focus on issues of literacy instruction and curriculum, some schools have formed a team consisting of a small, representative group of staff referred to as the *school literacy team* or *building literacy team*. The members of a successful school literacy team can support each other and their colleagues resolve everyday, routine literacy issues, and they can also support each other during major change, such as a new principal.

The principal, teachers who represent each grade level, support staff, and the school's literacy coach often constitute a school literacy team, which meets routinely. While each member plays an important role, the literacy coach is frequently responsible for setting up the team. Early on, your most important job may be to keep reminding everyone that developing an effective school literacy team will not be easy; it will require time and patience, but its rewards will be worth the effort. As time goes by, principals frequently learn to welcome and value the support of the team. At the same time, teachers on the team become proud of their role in supporting their school's literacy development and gain a new level of respect for their principal's role.

Each school's vision for the team may be different. For example, depending on the principal's leadership style, the principal may share leadership and even some of the decision making. But even at schools in which the principal prefers to make most or all decisions, the principal looks to the team for valuable input and advice. Regardless of the form of leadership, the principal, literacy coach, and teachers can come together to assess the school's needs, establish goals and priorities for literacy, and develop a professional development agenda to meet their goals (DeStefano & Hanson, 2007).

In the beginning, teams carefully outline routines, protocols, roles, responsibilities, and a statement of purpose or vision for the school. School literacy team members also serve as liaisons to the rest of the staff, bringing messages and information to grade-level teams, as well as to other school committees, such as parent groups. Over time, the school literacy team begins to tackle important jobs, such as determining whether

the school has a coherent curriculum across all grades, investigating assessment data to establish needs, and forming study groups (see “Planning a Teachers’ Study Group” on page 192) to read about the most current literacy information.

Once you’ve established a school literacy team, use the following School Literacy Team Survey to assess the team member’s attitudes about the effectiveness of the meetings and their work. You can use their responses to plan professional development opportunities and adjust the meeting format.

### Reference for further learning

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DeStefano, L., & Hanson, M. (2007). *Dimensions of school practice that support and improve student literacy achievement*. Report from the Searle Funds at the Chicago Community Trust.

### GOALS

- To demonstrate the important role of a literacy team.
- To establish a literacy vision for the school.
- To develop professional development opportunities that match the school’s literacy vision and needs.
- To support the administration by providing multiple voices that represent the staff.
- To create structures to assess and develop plans for cohesive curriculum across grades.
- To build a system for handling change, such as a new principal or new state mandates.

### IMPLEMENTATION

1. Meet with the principal to develop a plan for forming a school literacy team based on the considerations listed below.
2. Discuss potential topics for the team to tackle and where leadership might be shared.
3. Consider the size and composition of the team. K–5 buildings may have one member from each grade level, while K–8 buildings may have a single teacher representing multiple grade levels. Will support staff be included?
4. Decide how team members will be chosen. Some schools solicit members, others ask for volunteers. Some use a staff meeting to ask everyone how members could be identified. Those selected for the team should be willing to study, learn, and problem solve in a team setting.
5. Clarify options for meeting times, taking into account contract issues for out-of-school-day meetings and substitute costs. Don’t choose the time but do consider options and constraints before letting the team decide.

6. Prepare an agenda for a first meeting that includes the principal's statement about where leadership can be shared, meeting times, and how the team will communicate with staff via note taking and agenda items. Some teams also record a preliminary vision for the team's goals.
7. Survey members after the first or second meeting using the School Literacy Team Survey customized to your needs to document early response and guide future meetings.

### **REFLECTION, EVALUATION, AND PLANNING**

1. How did team members respond to their proposed roles?
2. How did the agenda work? For example, how did time allotments work to cover all topics, review next steps, and construct the next meeting's agenda?
3. How will you handle, collate, and share the surveys with the team so that they can collaborate to work out issues?
4. What trends were suggested by the School Literacy Team Survey? How will you present those trends at the next meeting of the school literacy team?
5. During the meeting, which type of members did most of the talking? How can you make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to speak? Which similar issues can be handled by the whole team at the next meeting?
6. Which discussions suggested the need to form a learning group around a particular topic?

# School Literacy Team Survey

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Not at All**  $\longrightarrow$  **Strongly Agree**

	1	2	3	4
1. I felt like my voice was heard today.				
2. I am beginning to understand my role.				
3. The agenda was organized effectively.				

4. What was the best feature of this SLT meeting?

5. What might improve future SLT meetings?

6. Other comments I wish to offer: