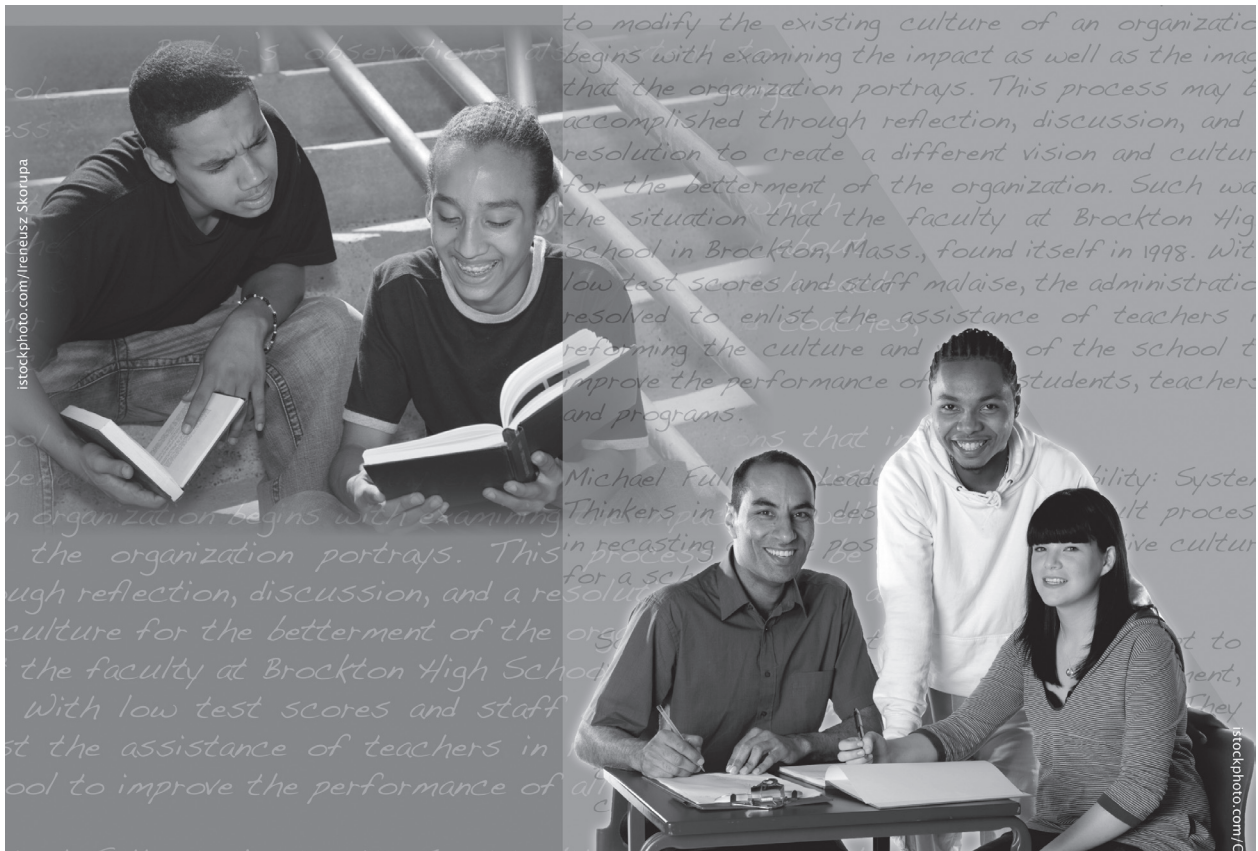


# Designing Literacy Initiatives for Whole School Improvement in Grades 7-12



**International Center  
for Leadership in Education**

## Acknowledgments

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- Strategies and best practices are interspersed throughout the resource kit for schools and districts to use when writing their own literacy plan. While every school has its own DNA, why reinvent the wheel? We can learn from what other schools and districts have discovered.
- Best practices, guidelines, and advice can help schools and districts with the more nebulous issues that might not always be anticipated. We don't always know what to expect when embarking on a new initiative. This resource kit helps a school or district stay one step ahead of the curve.
- This resource kit can be used in myriad ways. For example:
  - An administrator may use the kit to introduce the idea of a schoolwide literacy initiative to staff.
  - A literacy coach may find the kit to be a valuable tool to build capacity when training administration and staff.
  - A literacy leadership team may use the kit as an effective guide to determine the best literacy approach when collaborating with all stakeholders.

To assist you in quickly finding sections that best meet the needs of your school, a chapter-by-chapter summary follows.

**Chapter 1: School Improvement Through a Literacy Focus** introduces the need for schoolwide literacy planning based on what we know today about students, their reading skills, the demands of print and digital material, and future job market demands. The emphasis here is on the relationship between school culture and improving literacy instructions across disciplines and grades. This chapter sets a foundation for planning literacy using a four-stage model for schoolwide improvement.

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**Chapter 2: The Brockton Story: Using Literacy to Change the Culture and Vision** delves into the history of a changed culture at Brockton High School, transitioning from then to now. This chapter answers the questions:

- Why did Brockton begin a literacy initiative?
- What were the conditions in the school when the process of change began?
- What factors contributed to the success of Brockton's process?

**Chapter 3: Planning for Growth and Change at Brockton** outlines the planning and growth experienced at Brockton. How was the change in vision and culture brought to fruition from 1995 to the present? Here the factors of Project Diploma, freshman academies, the use of data for decision making, and the importance of the Restructuring Committee are described in detail. Faculty buy-in, the use of safety nets to support all students, and a myriad of organizational structures are presented as designs to support and recognize students.

**Chapter 4: The Literacy Initiative at Brockton** provides in depth descriptions of the key elements in the Brockton experience:

- a definition of literacy
- a train-the-trainer model
- open-response training in writing
- active reading strategies
- professional development
- measurement of outcomes
- training scripts
- common vision and vocabulary
- celebrations of success

**Chapter 5: Evidence of Success at Brockton** addresses the question, “What data exist that demonstrates the success of the literacy initiative?” The data indicate that Brockton’s students progressed to the point where 25% of the graduating seniors in 2008 received full college scholarships from the State of Massachusetts to attend state public colleges, the highest percentage allowed under state regulations. Descriptions are also offered on how data is used to influence instructional decisions at the classroom level and with ELL students.

**Chapter 6: Four Case Studies of Schoolwide Literacy Initiatives** features three high schools and one district that have successfully implemented literacy initiatives. All four programs have unique approaches and demonstrate that there is no one “right way” to make literacy work. Yet all four programs do possess similar essential characteristics that everyone can learn from.

**Chapter 7: Tools for Literacy Improvement** lays out the tools that are available to support efforts to build a literacy initiative. Based on the four-stage schoolwide literacy improvement process, a full description is provided of how Brockton moved from one stage to another, who was involved, what actions were completed, and how the evaluation was constructed. The chapter concludes with an outline of six highly effective tools:

- Components of School Excellence
- Principles of Change
- Rigor/Relevance Framework®
- Learning Criteria to Support 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners
- We Surveys Suite
- Leading with Literacy Survey

**Chapter 8: Content Area Strategies** provides multiple literacy strategies that can be used by individual teachers or as part of a schoolwide approach. This chapter not only explains the strategies, it demonstrates how schools

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can use the strategies as part of their professional development plan. Whether organized by pre-, during-, or post learning strategies, strategies for all content areas, or strategies for specific content areas, this chapter unlocks rich ideas.

**Chapter 9: Practices and Instruction** offers practical recommendations for starting a literacy initiative, working with ELL students, and making the most of professional development time. It also gives suggestions for how to use young adult literature to enhance a literacy initiative.

**Chapter 10: Suggestions for Administrators, Literacy Coaches, and Teacher Leaders** shares advice for how to implement a literacy initiative. Recommendations are given for all four stages of implementation to help a team better prepare for and adapt to its literacy plans. This chapter also contains specific suggestions for administrators, literacy coaches, and teacher leaders to help every school member empower each other and achieve success in their respective roles.

**Chapter 11: Paradigms to Guide the Literacy Initiative** provides tools to help schools and districts as they write and implement their own literacy initiatives. Checklists and questionnaires walk schools and districts through the process. The chapter culminates with a discussion of the relationships between a literacy initiative and the Rigor/Relevance Framework, the Learning Criteria, and the Components of School Excellence.

The **Appendix** provides numerous resources to support a literacy initiative.

**CD and DVDs:** Three disks are included with the resource kit. The CD contains electronic copies of activities, checklists, and questionnaires from the kit, which can be printed and adapted for use. Look for the CD icon next to the text. There are two video presentations. *Vision Through Literacy* features Sue Szachowicz, principal of Brockton High School, describing her school's literacy approach. Brockton's schoolwide literacy initiative





## Chapter 7

# Tools for Literacy Improvement

### The Changing Face of Literacy

McBride, T. and Nief, R.  
“Beloit College Mindset  
List,” June 2009  
[www.beloit.edu/  
mindset/2011.php](http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/2011.php).

PAW = Parents are  
watching.

PCM = Please call  
me.

The meaning of “literacy” continues to evolve. When we consider our cultural backgrounds compared to today’s students, changing standards are increasingly apparent. The Beloit College Mindset List, compiled annually, describes the cultural current milieu of incoming freshmen. In the 2009 assessment, the authors observed:

As millions of students head off to college this fall, most will continue to experience the economic anxiety that marked their first two years of life just as it has marked their last two years of high school. Fears of the middle class — including their parents — about retirement and health care have been a part of their lives. Now however, they can turn to technology and text a friend: “Momdad still worried bout stocks. urs 2? PAW PCM.”

Members of the class of 2013 won’t be surprised when they can charge a latté on their cell phone and curl up in the corner to read a textbook on an electronic screen. The migration of once independent media — radio, TV, videos and CDs — to the computer has never amazed them. They have grown up in a politically correct universe in which multi-culturalism has been a given. It is a world organized around globalization, with McDonald’s everywhere on the planet. Carter and Reagan are as distant to them as Truman and Eisenhower were to their parents. Tattoos, once thought “lower class,” are, to them, quite chic. Everybody knows the news before the evening news comes on.

The class of 2013 heads off to college as tolerant, global, and technologically hip. The 2009 mindset lists more than 35 perceptions, including:

1. The Green Giant has always been Shrek, not the big guy picking vegetables.

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2. They have never used a card catalog to find a book.
3. Salsa has always outsold ketchup.
4. Tattoos have always been very chic and highly visible.
5. They have been preparing for the arrival of HDTV all their lives.
6. Rap music has always been mainstream.
7. Chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream has always been a flavor choice.
8. They have never understood the meaning of R.S.V.P.
9. American students have always lived anxiously with high-stakes education testing.
10. Text has always been hyper.

As educators face the challenge of the cultural divide, so too must they challenge their notion of literacy. The literacy tools presented in this chapter are derived from model schools that have improved their literacy programs.

The preceding chapters outlined the process of addressing literacy initiatives in successful schools. *Questions to Consider* and *Key Factors* encourage readers to apply the process of literacy improvement from these schools to the unique circumstances operating in their own school and district. Now is the time to provide the tools necessary to support a literacy initiative.

Brockton High School is one example of improved student performance through literacy training. School personnel considered the impact of school culture and climate in their ability to bring about positive change within their buildings. As you follow the progress of each school's journey highlighted in this resource kit, essential activities for teachers

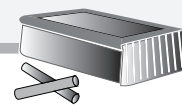
### **Constructing a Schoolwide Literacy Initiative**

and students will underscore how successful schools became more proficient in their use of literacy strategies.

How do the unique circumstances in your school fit the process description of schoolwide literacy improvement? Start by reflecting on the following questions concerning your school:

### Schoolwide Literacy Questions to Consider

- ✓ What have we already done to address literacy improvement?
- ✓ What will we need to develop to negotiate successfully through the four stages?
- ✓ Who will need to be involved from our school?
- ✓ What timeline is appropriate for the process?
- ✓ What materials, forms, data, and resources need to be collected?
- ✓ What advantages do we have in our favor that will help us succeed?
- ✓ What disadvantages will need to be addressed if we are to succeed?



The schools and districts described in this resource kit began their efforts toward schoolwide literacy improvement based on a perceived need generated in answer to the statement, “What we are now doing is not getting the results we want!” In essence, the faculty and administration asked, “What plan for curriculum and instruction is necessary if our

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### Math

#### SG4R

Many students read their novel for English class the same way they read their biology textbook, but often they approach their math book differently – they do not read it at all! Some students do not see the value, some find it too intimidating, and some believe that they only need to read the problems and can skip over any prose contained anywhere in the text. SG4R (**S**urvey, **G**oal, **R**ecall, **R**ecord, **R**evise, **R**eflect) is effective because it lends itself beautifully to math textbooks.

#### SG4R=

- Survey
- Goal setting
- Record plan for goal
- Review document or source for information needed
- Record information or answer
- Revise goal and plan as needed in light of new information

<b>Survey</b> List type of document or source and major components	<b>Review</b> Review the document or source and locate the needed information. Highlight or note the location of needed information.
<b>Goal</b> Read task or prompt and write a goal or question for answering the prompt or completing the task.	<b>Record</b> Record the information, answer, or decision.
<b>Record</b> Record your plan or steps for completing the goal.	<b>Revise</b> Revise the goal and plan if needed in light of new information.

A variation of SG4R that follows has slightly different terminology to help students read their way through a section.

**SG4R**

<b>SURVEY</b>	<b>SURVEY</b>
List the heading.	
<b>GOAL</b>	<b>GOAL</b>
Write the objective(s).	
<b>RECALL</b>	<b>RECALL</b>
Recall previous knowledge.	
<b>RECORD</b>	<b>RECORD</b>
Write the new vocabulary words. Write the new concepts.	
<b>REVISE</b>	<b>REVISE</b>
If necessary, revise your recall knowledge.	
<b>REFLECT</b>	<b>REFLECT</b>
How will this content be usable in school and life? How long is this strategy useful for me?	

*Created by LuAnn Hillestad at Kaukauna High School, Kaukauna, Wisc.*

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**Survey:** Write the name of the chapter section.

**Goal:** Write the objective(s) of the section.

**Recall:** Try to write down as much as you can remember using only the information from the survey and goal.

**Record:** Write down the new concepts and vocabulary learned in the section. (More detail can be written on the back of the sheet if necessary.)

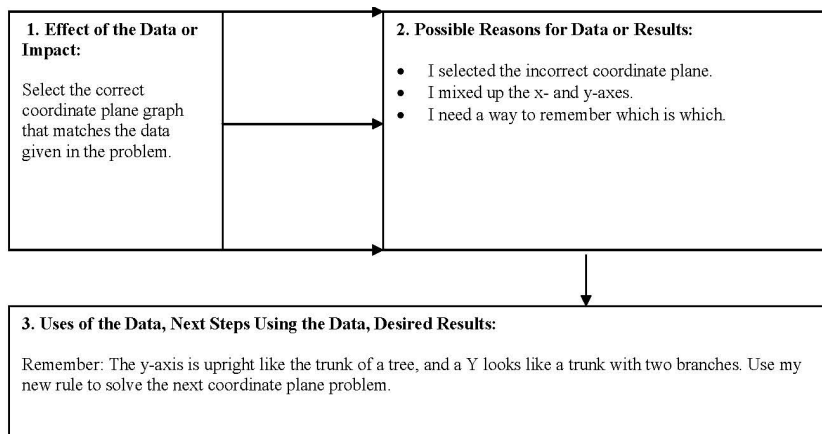
**Revise:** If necessary, revise and correct your recall knowledge.

**Reflect:** How is this content useful to me? How is this strategy useful to me? Reflect and write down your answers.

### Adapted Cause and Effect

Some students need very little help to remember how to navigate through word problems or complex mathematical formulas. For other students, Adapted Cause and Effect can make the difference between comprehension and confusion. This strategy gives students space to work through and keep track of their thinking.

### Coordinate Plane Problem Solving Evaluation for Beginning Algebra



Chapters 2, 3, and 5 explained the process that schools highlighted in this resource kit had used to identify their needs and strengths in literacy, and how they had responded to the challenge of training and supporting students in processing written material effectively. In each case the school personnel addressed five steps:

- Identify the literacy issues, needs, and resources within the building
- Develop a consensus on the need for change that incorporates training, curriculum, and instructional modifications
- Build the capacity to address literacy issues using building staff.
- Design and implement action steps to support change over time.
- Monitor, evaluate, and modify plans as success is achieved.

Each school raised awareness of the need for literacy training and the acceptance of innovative ideas for the classroom. Extensive professional training was provided over time that was teacher led, content specific, and supported by the administration through observations and resources. In each case the administration reviewed school procedures, rubrics, and protocols to ensure that student and teacher behaviors and expectations enriched the literacy initiative.

When a school successfully engages in literacy planning, it addresses all aspects of the initiative.

To achieve the desired outcomes, each school should consider its unique circumstances by reviewing and asking critical questions. Table 1 lists these questions based on the DNA of the school and provides a format for gathering information.

**Literacy Planning  
Essential Factors**

- ✓ Administrative leadership is involved, supportive, and aggressive.
- ✓ Collaboration is built on open communication.
- ✓ Data are the starting point for changing culture, expectations, and performance.
- ✓ Goals and outcomes are clear and communicated frequently.
- ✓ All staff members accept responsibility for addressing literacy needs in a schoolwide process.
- ✓ Resources are identified for the initiative and a long-range commitment is made.
- ✓ Successes are celebrated and new goals are determined.
- ✓ A team approach utilizes the expertise of administrators, a literacy coach, and teacher leaders.



**Table 1**

**Gathering Information to Begin a Schoolwide Literacy Program**

Check the appropriate column for each factor.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Explain</b>
Data/evidence exists regarding student literacy skills, levels, and needs.			
Data on student reading skills are accessible by teachers.			
The faculty has a culture of high expectations, rigorous and relevant instruction, and strong, respected relationships.			



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Respond to the appropriate column for each factor.			
	Yes	No	Explain
The faculty shares a belief that achievement levels should be higher.			
The administration encourages a dialogue about expectations, instructional rigor, and student test results.			
Information from recent graduates exists on how well they were prepared for postsecondary education.			
Time and resources exist to support professional development.			

Responding to the yes-, no-, explain-sequence in the table allows an examination of individual differences found in buildings. The history of the school impacts what the “best” approach to literacy development should be for that school. Gathering the information called for in the table will be tempered by what has taken place in the recent history of the school. To define a solid, workable approach to literacy training that would be accepted and embraced by teachers, the following questions can guide decisions:

### Unique School Histories Impact Literacy Plans

- What initiatives have been attempted in the past five years?
- What challenges faced the teachers within the building in recent years?
- Do teachers believe that students can work at higher, more rigorous levels and succeed? If not, what can be done to help all teachers believe?
- Would most teachers, administrators, and the board of education agree on common school goals for improving education outcomes and student performance?
- Is there a consensus of beliefs across disciplines and grade levels about the need for literacy training?
- Are resources available that can support training over time?

The answers to these questions reflect both the culture and climate of the building’s recent history. They are necessary considerations in beginning a long-term, rigorous literacy initiative.

### Successful Literacy Plans

Schools that have developed productive literacy programs have employed different approaches to achieving success. Research continues to verify various steps that most schools can and should address in professional development.

Miller, M., Bell, E., and Holland, D. “Slow Turn Ahead”

Schools that have developed productive literacy programs have employed different approaches to achieving success. Research continues to verify various steps that most schools can and should address in professional development. Birdville Independent School District in Texas, for example, identified five key principles in its staff development activities:

- Allocate time and resources.
- Include instructional leaders — both teachers and administrators.
- Collaborate in teams.
- Engage everyone in meaningful learning and work.
- Use data to make decisions.

Throughout this resource kit, four stages described the process buildings and districts followed in organizing targeted, enriched literacy initiatives. To organize a new literacy program, consider how to address each stage to achieve lasting, higher student performance across all curricular areas.

Stages of Schoolwide Improvement
<p><b>Stage 1. Assess needs</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Create a common vision</li> <li>B. Assess the school culture</li> <li>C. Assess student performance data</li> <li>D. Incorporate school history</li> <li>E. Identify challenges and supporting conditions</li> </ul>

<b>Stages of Schoolwide Improvement</b>
<b>Stage 2. Plan for change and improvement</b>
A. Share leadership and decision making B. Build trust C. Apply the Learning Criteria D. Involve stakeholders
<b>Stage 3. Implement action steps</b>
A. Focus on literacy strategies B. Design professional development C. Use the leadership team D. Organize instructional support E. Meet the needs of ALL students
<b>Stage 4. Sustain improved performance</b>
A. Assess progress toward program goals B. Use the Learning Criteria to evaluate and monitor progress C. Modify goals, action plans, and expectations D. Recognize/celebrate success

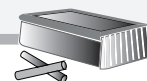
Applying the four-stage development/school improvement process to constructing a schoolwide literacy program may require further description of the steps pursued by the schools included in this resource kit. After responding to the questions posed in earlier chapters focusing on the unique school history, the following questions address concrete decisions needed to complete a written plan for implementation.

## Change Process

### Constructing a Literacy Initiative

#### Questions to Consider

- ✓ How should a school address steps taken by schools like Brockton and other schools that have achieved schoolwide literacy?
- ✓ Who should be involved and consulted?
- ✓ What time frame would be appropriate for a literacy initiative?
- ✓ What policies, procedures, and school structures will need to be discussed?
- ✓ What new or existing resources will be needed for a literacy plan?
- ✓ How should staff training be designed and implemented?
- ✓ Are there steps taken by schools like Brockton or others that are not necessary for every school?
- ✓ Is the school at a stage of development where a full multi-year program can be designed or should the process ensue one step at a time (allowing “happenstance” to guide the implementation process)?



### Major Steps of the Brockton Initiative

The following aspects of the literacy initiative at Brockton High School can help schools to envision the process of change and the specific steps that need addressing.

- **Creation of the Restructuring Committee.** Essentially a think tank for the school, this group consisted of 32-35 members including faculty representing every department in the school and administrators. The committee operated with two central goals: (1) increase student

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academic achievement and (2) personalize the education experience for every student. Funded locally, the Restructuring Committee was the driving force in the continuous improvement of the school and it was responsible for all the literacy initiatives. Other schools may use terms such as “literacy team” or “leadership team.” Whatever the group is called, this is the team that creates change.

- **Creation and implementation of a new schedule.** A committee designed and implemented a new schedule for the school that significantly increased the amount of time in classes (from 40- to 60-minute periods) and shifted the pedagogy from primarily teacher lectures and delivery of information to a student-centered classroom focused on student thinking and the articulation of ideas. Faculty were deeply involved in the scheduling change process and participated in numerous discussions and workshops on changing instruction. Bill Daggett, President of the International Center, advises to “change instruction, not structure.” While it is noteworthy that Brockton was able to change its schedule, many schools will find that changing the way they deliver instruction will reap many benefits as well.
- **Redesign of academic levels and implementation of a grade achievement policy.** When the initial MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) results in English language arts and math for Brockton arrived, the scores were poor. It was clear that teacher expectations were far too low for their students, so the Restructuring Committee began to examine how the students were grouped. Traditional levels were restructured and renamed, and clear standards and expectations for all levels were created. Students themselves needed to take greater responsibility in selecting their course levels. The new academic levels and grade achievement policy contributed to high standards and expectations for all students. Level guidelines and the grade achievement policy were provided in supporting documentation.

Bill Daggett, CEO of the International Center, advises to “change instruction, not structure.”

## 11 Paradigms to Guide the Literacy Initiative

- **Development of a schoolwide literacy program.** Literacy objectives in reading, writing, speaking, and reasoning were developed, charts were created and posted in every classroom, and teachers were trained in how to teach and integrate these skills in their classes. Teachers included these literacy objectives in their lesson plans and administrators evaluated the objectives in formal and informal observations.
- **Schoolwide open-response writing initiative.** The entire faculty was trained in the open-response writing sections of the MCAS, and every department had to implement open-response writing in its content area. The process was implemented according to a specific calendar to ensure that students received repeated practice of the skill. Student work was collected and reviewed by both teachers and administrators. Jensen Beach High School, in Jensen Beach, Fla., is another school that focused on Writing Across the Curriculum, while LaGrange High School, in Lake Charles, La., focused on strategies. There is no one “right” way to proceed. What is important is that schools have a plan.
- **Faculty meetings become professional development literacy workshops/collegial dialogues.** Every faculty meeting was used for professional development, literacy training, or interdisciplinary faculty discussions on school improvement.
- **Implementation of a house plan.** Scheduling processes were changed so that students, particularly in grades 9 and 10, were scheduled in one house as part of a small learning community initiative. The school-within-a-school design allowed students to remain with the same faculty over four years.
- **Creation and implementation of:**
  - *a Freshman Academy.* At-risk 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were identified from each of the four junior high schools based on significant

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academic deficiencies in English and math. These students were grouped together for three of the five periods per day and remained with the same teachers for homeroom, English, algebra, and a tutorial at the end of the day. Two academies have been created to accommodate approximately 100 freshmen. LaGrange also created a Freshman Academy, but changing the structure is not a requirement for success. A school may find more success by changing instruction — to create the desire for changing the structure.

- o *individual student success plans.* For every student who did not pass the MCAS, an individual student success plan was created detailing steps the student must take and the services the school would provide to ensure that the student will pass the retest. The counselor, the student, and the parent must sign off on the plan.
- o *academic success contracts for freshmen.* After the first term, the house administrators reviewed the grades and disciplinary referrals for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. For students deemed at risk, intervention strategies were put into place through meetings with students, parents, counselors, and teachers.
- o *adult and peer mentoring programs.* To support struggling students, both adult and upper-class student mentors are used to counsel and advise. This program took place primarily after school hours. Often these referrals were made through the Academic Success Contract meetings, as well as through teachers and counselors.
- o *orientation programs aimed at 9<sup>th</sup> grade success.* Five very successful orientation programs have now been developed to help students and parents succeed in their transition to Brockton: time management, study skills, career planning, Road to Success, and test taking.

- Celebrations of academic success and school improvement.**  
 For many years there was little recognition of academic success. Now each term students who make the honor roll are treated to an entertaining assembly by the principal’s invitation; seniors who earn A’s in department earn a good citizenship ID (all students wear IDs) which entitles them to special privileges. Each month approximately 25 students receive the “Boxer of the Month” designation and are treated to a special program for demonstrating good works and kindness to others. These gestures contribute to a positive student attitude.

Armed with information on what successful initiatives address, the necessary steps, and the sequence many schools follow, the following table can serve as a guide to designing a program for your school.

**Table 2**

<b>Designing a Schoolwide Literacy Initiative</b>			
Complete each column for each stage and step.			
<b>Stages of Schoolwide Improvement</b>	<b>When Completed?</b>	<b>Who Is Responsible?</b>	<b>Products</b>
<b>Stage 1. Assess needs</b>			
A. Create a common vision			
B. Assess the school culture			
C. Assess student performance data			
D. Incorporate school history			
E. Identify challenges and supporting conditions			



## Designing Literacy Initiatives for Whole School Improvement in Grades 7-12

Stages of Schoolwide Improvement	When Completed?	Who Is Responsible?	Products
<b>Stage 2. Plan for change and improvement</b>			
A. Share leadership and decision making			
B. Build trust			
C. Apply the Learning Criteria			
D. Involve stakeholders			
<b>Stage 3. Implement action steps</b>			
A. Focus on literacy strategies			
B. Design professional development			
C. Use the leadership team			
D. Organize instructional and curriculum development support			
E. Meet the needs of ALL students			
<b>Stage 4. Sustain improved performance</b>			
A. Reassess progress toward program goals			
B. Use the Learning Criteria to evaluate and monitor progress			
C. Modify goals, action plans, and expectations			
D. Recognize/celebrate success			