SECTION A

LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM DIRECTION
LANGUAGE ARTS PHILOSOPHY

We believe that all children can learn to read and write and that it is our responsibility as professional educators to provide the instructional support necessary to help students become effective readers and writers. To achieve this goal we support a balanced approach to literacy that fosters the interconnection of reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Through a balanced approach to literacy, students are engaged in authentic (meaningful) reading and writing activities using a wide array of text experiences. These experiences include use of a literature-based anthology, trade books, fiction, non-fiction and a wide variety of genre. Students participate in teacher guided strategy instruction, guided reading, literature circles, read alouds, and independent reading. Writing instruction includes the process approach to writing, teacher guided strategy instruction through mini-lessons, writer’s workshop, response to literature and journal writing.

We support a constructivist approach to literacy instruction and by that we mean the use of instructional strategies that encourage students to actively develop meaning from text and actively convey meaning by composing their own writing. One important element of a constructivist approach to literacy learning is instructional decision making that is guided by ongoing assessment of the student’s progress and learning needs. In this approach teachers use scaffolding strategies that make challenging reading and writing tasks more accessible to students. They use differentiated instruction to provide different levels of scaffolding or varied instructional goals to meet the needs of students. They model the cognitive strategies that good readers and writers use to interpret text or to write text and involve students in practicing those strategies. They coach students as they practice strategies so that students can reflect on their reading and writing and improve their performance. They use the gradual release of responsibility model whereby students grow to become more capable of independent responsibility for reading and writing tasks. This process is supported by a rich and creative learning environment that nourishes student enthusiasm to be life long readers and writers.

The key factors for coordinating Language Arts instruction over a student’s school experience are the use of the Language Arts Benchmarks to guide decisions about student learning, accurate and ongoing assessment information regarding individual student progress, communication between teachers at different grade levels, and common professional development experiences to exchange professional knowledge regarding effective Language Arts instruction. Language Arts instruction is also supported by a school library that has a wide array of resources and by a partnership with parents to support literacy development at home.
LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM DIRECTION AND EXPECTATIONS

We believe:

A. The most important ingredient in effective instruction is the teacher’s ability to think critically about the instructional strategies she/he is choosing. Therefore, an appropriate teacher expectation is the ability to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of instructional strategies, choose the best synthesis of approaches, and know why one has selected the strategies one uses. The school system should be expected to develop the environment and conditions needed to support this critical reflection through study groups, professional development and opportunities for cooperative teacher planning and sharing.

B. That effective and desirable instruction uses a synthesis of constructivist approaches to instruction and direct instruction, and we encourage the implementation of this perspective.

Example: This means that balanced literacy instruction will include the direct instruction of phonetic relationships and development of those relationships through application in authentic literature. It also means that instruction in writing will include the process approach to writing and direct instruction in writing skills.

C. We also believe in teaching spelling through writing and through direct instruction.

D. Vocabulary development positively influences reading comprehension. All students develop vocabulary through immersion in language rich literacy activities. Direct instruction of vocabulary is most effective when students experience multiple exposures to the words to be learned. This includes giving students information about the words’ definitions as well as illustrating the words’ usages in different contexts.

E. In a balanced approach to literacy developed through the use of an anthology and trade books. We develop student reading of trade books through guided reading in the primary grades and through literature circles in the intermediate and middle school grades.

F. Reading and writing are mutually supportive processes that develop simultaneously. They should be taught in conjunction with each other.

G. That ongoing student assessment should be used to guide instructional decision making. We believe that ongoing assessment and analysis of that assessment is the key to making the right instructional decisions for each child.

H. Teachers should use the Grade level Benchmarks and Developmental Continuum to guide their instructional planning and student assessment.

I. Teachers should use management tools such as portfolios, observation checklists, anecdotal records and rubrics to maintain student assessment information, evaluate the data, and relate it to instructional decisions.
J. A written record for individual students should be maintained that contains agreed on data for continuity of instructional planning from one grade to the next. The Chelmsford Public Schools Language Arts Portfolio contains records that can be used for this purpose (observation checklists, rubrics, book logs, writing samples). Additionally DRA scores are a helpful record.

K. Classroom management should diversify instruction to meet the individual needs of students using flexible grouping strategies. This approach to diversifying instruction is described in this curriculum guide in the section titled: Balanced Literacy Instruction to Meet Individual Student Needs.

L. Teachers should be aware of the core literature list as outlined in “The Literature Selection Guide” and how to use it to coordinate instruction with other grade levels.

M. The development of information literacy skills in conjunction with use of the library is a crucial component of a modern Language Arts program.

N. The approach to literacy instruction described in these program expectations also provides effective instruction for English Language Learners in learning English. It is important that ELL students experience immersion in good literacy activities rather than isolated skill practice.

O. Coordination among classroom teachers, reading specialists, special education specialists and ELL tutors is essential for effective service delivery to students.

P. School programs should actively encourage and develop parental capacity to support literacy development.
BALANCED LITERACY INSTRUCTION TO MEET INDIVIDUAL STUDENT NEEDS

Chelmsford’s balanced literacy program includes the use of a literature-based anthology and trade books for guided reading, literature circles, read-alouds, and independent reading. Planning around classroom management needs to be based on a program that uses both sets of instructional materials and this planning must be based on an understanding of the purposes for using each.

We use the anthology to provide a basis for strategies and skill development in grade appropriate text. The anthology serves as a grade level standard to use as a guide for the development of student performance. The anthology should be used as an instructional tool for all students. It requires varying amounts of scaffolding to help struggling readers successfully access the text. (Research has shown that struggling readers who are not exposed to grade level text actually see the gap in their reading development increase.)

The value of adding guided reading to an anthology is that it allows students to apply and practice skills and strategies and develop fluency in text at their instructional level. This is the place where students develop a self-extending system to increase their ability to access more challenging text.

Flexible grouping is required in all aspects of a balanced literacy program, including the anthology, in order to meet the varying instructional needs and interest levels of all students within a grade level. These temporary groups will change throughout the year as students grow, and as the teacher identifies specific skills that need to be taught or reinforced. These dynamic groups meet for one lesson, one week, or longer. Groups may focus on decoding, comprehension, writing process, writing mechanics, or topics of student interest, depending on the needs of students within these areas.

Strategy instruction that allows students to construct meaning independently is a critical component of a balanced literacy program. It is the teacher’s responsibility to make visible the invisible strategies used by proficient readers to construct meaning. Chelmsford promotes the use of the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Pearson and Gallagher 1983) for delivering explicit instruction in thinking and reading comprehension strategies. This model begins with extensive teacher modeling with shared reading of the anthology and/or read-alouds. In the second stage, guided practice, teacher modeling continues with increased student participation, and moves into small groups like flexible anthology groups, partner reading, guided reading groups, and literature circles. At this stage, the teacher can assess the students’ readiness for the third stage, independent practice. Next, students have the opportunity to practice the strategies independently with regular feedback from the teacher and other students. Students apply the strategy in their independent reading across a variety of different genres, settings, contexts, and disciplines.
The succeeding pages provide resource information about the implementation of this approach to literacy instruction. The following sections are provided:

- Balanced Literacy Instruction: Implementing Components of the Program
- Suggestions for Scaffolding Instruction
- How Much Time Do We Have For ELA at the Elementary Level?

Language Arts Program Components

**Reading**

*Anthology* – Scholastic Literacy Place
  - Classroom Libraries, Decodable Books, Big Books, Poetry Charts

*Guided Reading* – small group, teacher-led instruction in comprehension and decoding strategies using leveled trade books.

*Literature Circles* – student-led, small group discussions around text that has been selected and read independently by the students.

*Read Alouds* – teacher reads text aloud for enjoyment purposes, or to introduce and/or reinforce student learning in the areas of vocabulary, comprehension, and text structure.

*Shared Reading* – instructional strategy in which the teacher involves students in the reading of text in order to develop reading strategies.

*Independent Reading*

*Partner Reading*

**Writing**

*Writers Workshop*

*Writing Portfolio*

*Reading Response*

*Journals*

*Interactive Writing*
**Writing for a Purpose** – prompt writing, reports

**Read Alouds** – teacher reads text aloud in order to expose students to a variety of writing styles and the author’s craft.
Role of the Anthology
1. Provides a rich language background.
2. Creates a baseline of common experiences that all students will be exposed to.
3. Provides a scope and sequence of skills that spiral.
4. Provides opportunities for the teacher to provide instruction in skills and strategies.
5. Serves as an approximate grade level range of text. Some students will be capable of reading more challenging text. Other students will need different amounts of scaffolding to develop understanding of the text.
6. Provides opportunities to respond in writing to selections read.

Role of Read Alouds
1. Creates common experience for a variety of purposes which include comprehension and vocabulary instruction.
2. Exposes students to story language, text structure, and writer’s craft.
3. Provides a tool for use during writing instruction (mini lessons).

Role of Guided Reading
1. Provides an opportunity for students to apply reading strategies in text at their instructional level to develop fluency and build comprehension.
2. Provides an opportunity for the teacher to observe and assess the student’s use of reading strategies.
3. Provides an opportunity for on-the-spot coaching from the teacher.
4. Guides the teacher to make informed decisions for future instruction.
5. Provides opportunities for written response through reading logs, response journals, post-its, graphic organizers, etc.

Role of Literature Circles
1. Provides student choice.
2. Provides an opportunity for students to engage with text and other readers in conversations.
3. Provides an opportunity for students to apply reading strategies in text that they are personally invested in.
4. Provides an opportunity for the teacher to observe and assess the student’s use of comprehension strategies.
5. Provides an opportunity for on-the-spot coaching to stimulate student learning and deeper conversations.
6. Guides the teacher to make informed decisions for future instruction.

Provides opportunities for written response through reading logs, response journals, role sheets, post-its, graphic organizers, etc.
Role of Writing Instruction
1. Provides opportunity for students to write on topics that are personally meaningful.
2. Provides opportunity for students to write for additional purposes such as writing in response to literature, writing prompts, journals and open ended questions.
3. Guides students to become more skillful writers through use of the following strategies:
   • Process writing
   • Writer’s workshop in which teachers model good writing, conference with students about their writing, provide mini-lessons for direct instruction in writing skills, and encourage peer editing by creating an audience for the writer to elicit feedback (author’s chair).
4. Guides students to improve their writing through self reflection facilitated by maintaining a portfolio of student work, the use of self-reflection sheets, and the use of rubrics for both teacher assessment and student self-assessment.
5. Maintains appropriate achievement expectations for student writing through the use of Chelmsford Public Schools Anchor Papers to represent grade level benchmarks for student proficiency in writing.
MCAS STRATEGIES

To: Elementary Faculty
From: Karen Mazza, Assistant Superintendent
Date: January 4, 2006
Re: MCAS Strategies

Each of the elementary schools have completed an analysis of the MCAS results for Spring 2005 and have generated a list of instructional strategies to use throughout the year to help students learn the skills necessary for success on the MCAS assessments. The elementary principals, Donna Foley, Gail Rines and I have met to discuss the strategies suggested at each school. The strategies generated from this analysis look very appropriate and I commend each faculty for your continued work to help students learn these important skills. To highlight some broad strategies to keep in mind across all schools, I am listing below some recommendations that we have learned collectively from reviewing the past five years of test results. Many of them are already listed on your individual school lists. They are provided for you here to provide commonality across all of our schools.

Recommended General Strategies to Prepare Students for Success on MCAS Tests

1. **Frequent practice matters.** Schools that report that they practice written compositions once every three to four weeks outscore those that do not. Similarly, frequent practice of open ended questions is also important. Students should be completing a minimum of one open ended question in reading and in Math each week.

2. **Even practice across writing, reading, and math and across multiple choice questions and open ended questions in reading and in math is important.** Schools that decide to emphasize one skill or subject one year, and take consistent practice off of other focus areas drop their performance the following year on the deemphasized area. Practice needs to be consistent and even across all areas and question types.

3. **Practice two ways.** The first way is to embed practice into your ongoing curriculum. The second way is to practice on previous MCAS test items, problems and writing prompts and commercially prepared MCAS like assessments. Both ways are important. This means that writing a topic of the student’s choice is important and writing to a specific prompt is also important. It means that reading full stories and books are important and so is practicing reading short passages with questions geared to those passages.

4. **Direct instruction of key skills and vocabulary is important.** For example, explicitly teaching students the skills needed to understand topic development is
important. Explicitly teaching students how to answer multiple step problems is important.

5. **Teacher modeling of quality work and feedback to the student are important.** Use examples of student work on the MCAS website and use the rubric to show students what goes into a high scoring response. Do this for the composition and for open ended questions in ELA and Math. Give students feedback on their work in relation to the rubric. The district rubric, the DOE rubrics and the Six Traits Writing Rubric are all helpful to use. Doing some common models with the class or in small groups using the overhead is a helpful strategy.

6. **Don’t get so caught up in doing the perfectly revised paper that you give up frequency of practice.** Keep your momentum up on frequency.

7. **Monitor student performance on the curriculum on an ongoing basis and target help to students who need to fill in gaps in their understanding of the curriculum on an ongoing basis.**

8. **Help students develop the understanding needed to know what is called for in multistep math problems and the endurance to complete all steps.**

9. **Help students discriminate distractor choices among multiple choice options.** Often one of the choices is very similar to the correct choice but isn’t quite right. Help them practice making those discriminations.

10. **Make sure that special education students practice all of the same strategies both in the regular classroom and when working with the special education teacher.** Collaborate on this so that each teacher knows what the other is doing.

11. **Keep a positive attitude about what you are doing.** Practicing these skills does not mean that we are selling out to teaching to the test. This test measures some very important skills and understanding that are worthwhile. They are an important part of our chosen curriculum. Just remember to keep a balanced approach. Teach in the context of our ongoing writing, reading and math curriculum and also do direct instruction, practice and modeling. Keep doing creative, engaging lessons but also provide targeted instruction to key skill development areas. It isn’t about either/or, it’s about balance. Use assessment as a good thing to identify how students need to improve so that you can guide their progress.

Thank you for your continued work in helping Chelmsford students succeed.
Students vary in their needs and strengths. The concept of scaffolding refers to the degree of support the teacher provides to help students with a reading task. Scaffolding refers to "a process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal (that) would be beyond his unassisted efforts."¹ There are two strategies for scaffolding reading instruction provided on the succeeding pages. The first model, "the gradual release of responsibility", describes a succession of teaching moves starting with teacher modeling and continuing with varied levels of assistance for student practice and application of a reading strategy. The second model describes a bank of strategies that teachers can select from to provide student guidance before reading, during reading and after reading. The number and type of strategies that would be selected from this bank of strategies will vary with the needs of students.

¹ Graves, Michael F., Juel, Connie, and Graves, Bonnie B. Teaching Reading in the 21st Century, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA, 2001, pg. 256
The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model*

- **Teacher Modeling**
  - The teacher explains the strategy.
  - The teacher demonstrates how to apply the strategy successfully.
  - The teacher thinks aloud to model the mental processes she/he uses when reading.

- **Guided Practice**
  - After explicitly modeling, the teacher gradually gives the student more responsibility for task completion.
  - The teacher and students practice the strategy together.
  - The teacher scaffolds the students’ attempts and supports student thinking, giving feedback during conferring and classroom discussions.
  - Students share their thinking processes with each other during paired reading and small and large group discussions.

- **Independent Practice**
  - After working with the teacher and with other students, the students try the strategy on their own.
  - The students receive regular feedback from the teacher and other students.

- **Application of the Strategy in Real Reading Situations**
  - Students apply a clearly understood strategy to a new genre or format.
  - Students demonstrate the effective use of a strategy in more difficult text.

*From Strategies That Work by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis, Stenhouse Publishers Page 13.*
## Suggestions for Scaffolding Instruction

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Comprehension</th>
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<td>- Book Introduction</td>
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<td>- Word Map</td>
<td>- Activate prior knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Pre-teach vocab</td>
<td>- Build background</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Teacher modeling of fluent</td>
<td>- Set purpose for reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Review word ID strategies</td>
<td>- Make predictions</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Mini-lesson on new skills and strategies</td>
<td>- Build schema (story structure or patterns of organization for fiction and non-fiction)</td>
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<td><strong>During Reading</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Coach in the use of word ID strategies</td>
<td>- Identify word meaning from context</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Coach for phrasing and fluency</td>
<td>- Model and teach self-monitoring</td>
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<td>- Promote self-monitoring of troublesome words</td>
<td>- Stop and restate</td>
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<td>- Confirm and continue prediction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Graphic Organizers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>After Reading</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Reread for fluency in various combinations</td>
<td>- Reread to confirm and clarify</td>
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<td>(echo, partner, choral)</td>
<td>- Graphic organizers</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Tape record student and have him listen to himself for self-evaluation</td>
<td>- Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Instruction in word ID</td>
<td>- Instruction in literary elements</td>
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<td>- Word study activities</td>
<td>- Instruction in cognitive strategies to derive meaning from text</td>
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<td>- Retelling</td>
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<td>- Summarizing</td>
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<td>- Written response</td>
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Glossary

Authentic assessment
A type of assessment that seeks to address widespread concerns about standardized,
norm-referenced testing by representing “literacy behavior of the community and
workplace” and reflecting “the actual learning and instructional activities of the
classroom and out-of-school worlds” (Hiebert et al., 1994), as with the use of portfolios,
naturalistic assessment. ¹

Authentic text
In student programs, text that has not been altered in form or content, as original
publications of children’s literature ²

Benchmarks
A standard by which something can be judged; a point of reference for measuring the
performance of a student on a well-defined task or set of tasks such as the Massachusetts
Curriculum Frameworks standards.

Direct instruction
A teacher-led instructional procedure that provides students with specific instructions on
a task, teacher-led practice, independent practice, and immediate corrective feedback

Information literacy
The term information literacy, sometimes referred to as information competency, is
generally defined as the ability to access, evaluate, organize, and use information from a
variety of sources. ³

Process writing
A writing instruction model that views writing as an ongoing process and in which
students follow a given set of procedures for planning, drafting, revising, editing (proof-
reading and correcting), and publishing (sharing by some means) their writing. ⁴

Self-extending system
A self-extending system is one in which a reader has the strategies for learning more
about the reading process as they read so that they build skills simply by encountering
many different kinds of text with a variety of new words. ⁵

¹ Harris, Theodore L., Hodges, Richard E.  The Literacy Dictionary: The Vocabulary of Reading and

² Ibid, pg 15

³ Humès, Barbara, “Understanding Information Literacy” United States Government Publishing.

⁴ Harris, Theodore L., Hodges, Richard E.  The Literacy Dictionary: The Vocabulary of Reading and

⁵ Fountas, Irene C., Pinnell, Gay Su,  Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3-5. Heinemann, Portsmouth,
NH, 2001, pg 8.