

Year 2 With EL Education Language Arts:

A Literacy Update for the School Committee

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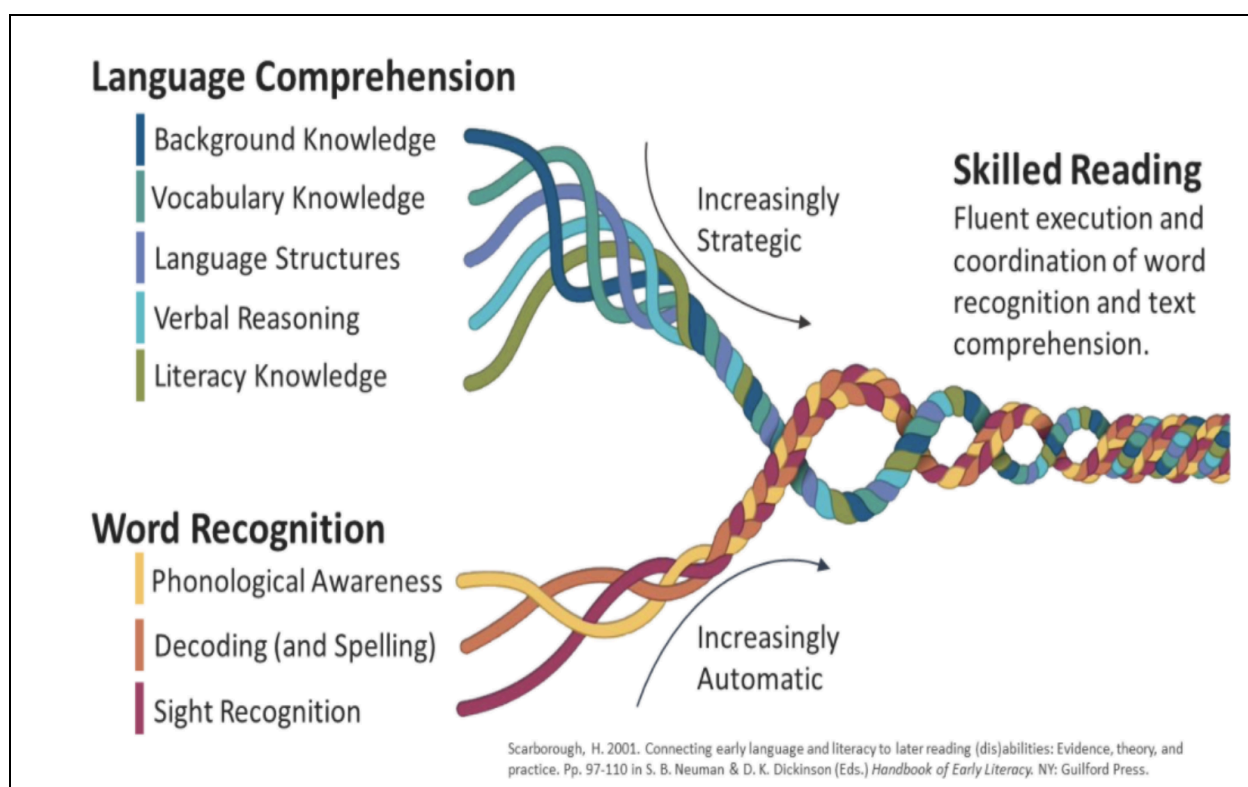
I. Overview

The shift in foundational reading practices in 2023-2024, together with the subsequent purchase of new curriculum materials for Grades K-6 last year, enabled our educators to align instruction with grade-level standards and research-based practices as defined by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Expanding this curriculum into Grades 7 and 8 this year will allow our students to continue building on that foundation as they progress through the upper grades. Essentially, our hope is that the high number of high-quality texts used in the curriculum, coupled with consistent protocols for student discourse and the integration of social competencies into academic routines will enable all students to succeed in meeting or exceeding grade level benchmarks. Realizing this vision is ongoing and remains our most important work.

While the results of the 2025 MCAS did not show the progress toward post-pandemic recovery that we had hoped for, our determination to advance students' literacy skills has been bolstered by investments in personnel and ongoing professional learning. Although overall district data demonstrates some gains, we must accelerate student growth in order to raise achievement scores. Helpfully, the most recent screener results show some gains in improved student outcomes. In this report I'll share information about the Fall Star Reading data, speak to trends over time and outline our action plan for the year ahead.

II. Foundational Learning

In order for students to successfully learn to read, they must develop both the foundational skills needed to read individual words (such as letter names, letter sounds, and accurate decoding) and the broader language skills needed to make meaning from increasingly complex text. The diagram below shows how these two components of the reading "rope" come together:

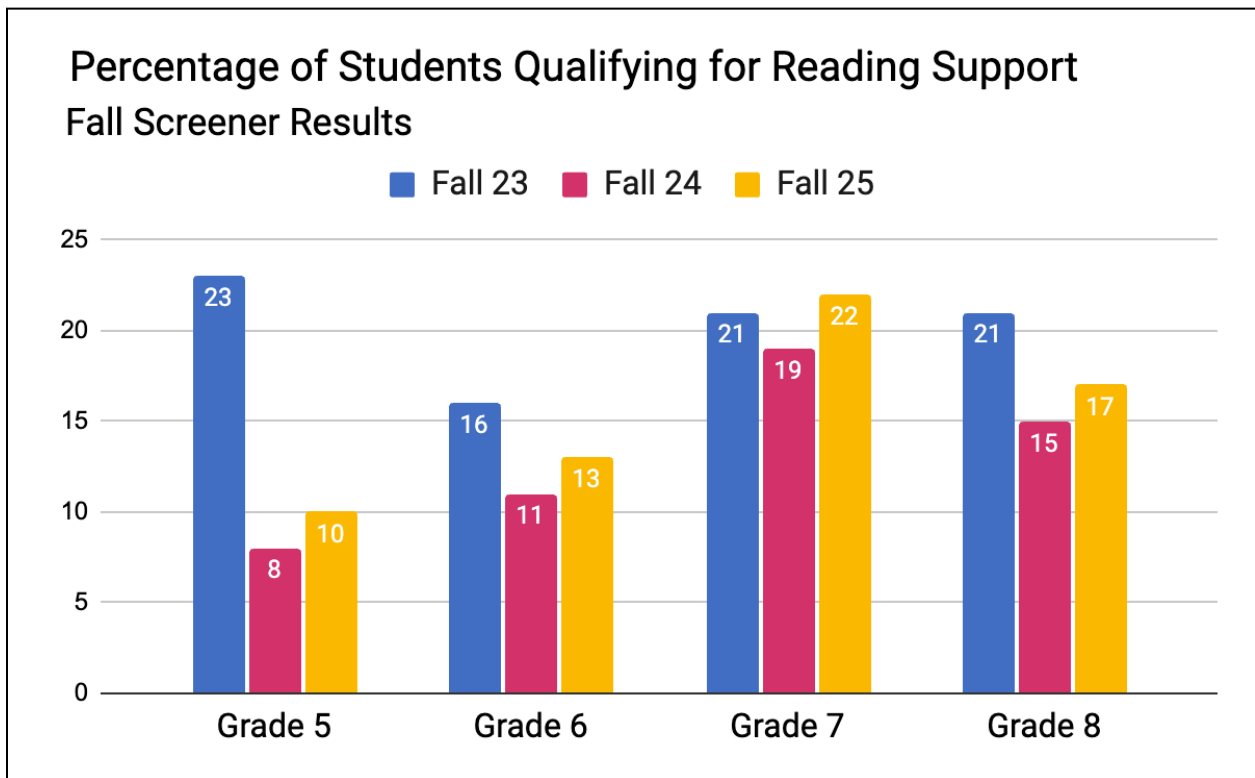
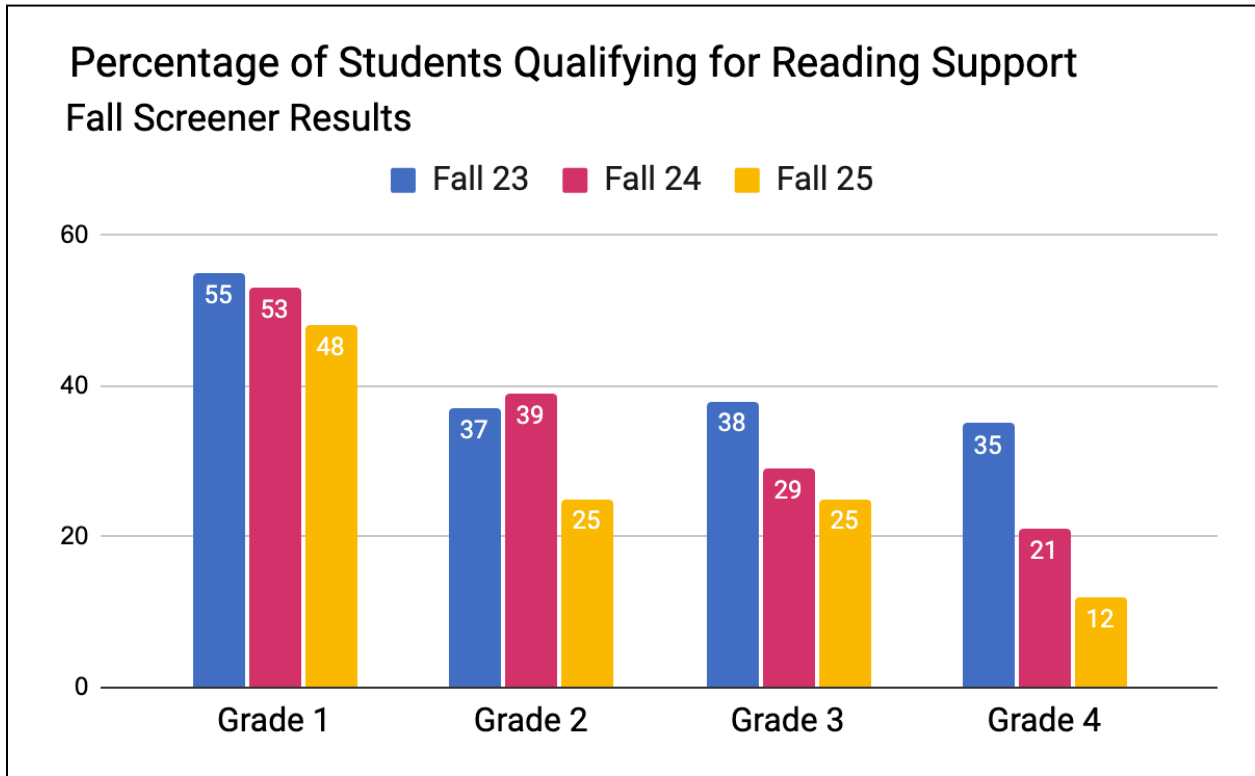


You may recall that the EL Education Language Arts curriculum was rated highly by EdReports, an independent third-party nonprofit organization designed to improve education. Further, panels of Massachusetts teachers convened by the DESE noted that the program also integrates both foundational reading and reading comprehension skills. For example, the structure of an EL Language Arts lesson includes reading and writing about a text and topic as well as the practice of ongoing phonics, grammar and language practice.

In our presentation the instructional coach team will demonstrate how Grade K-2 students build automaticity with word recognition skills. Sometimes students require more than a strong core curriculum to meet grade level expectations, and intervening in the primary grades is key. Our districtwide data shows the impact of our investment in ensuring all students receive the support they need to learn the basics.

In Grades K-8, we use common criteria to determine which students are eligible to receive additional help with reading, ensuring that resources are allocated equitably across the district. Thereafter, educators use screening tools to monitor student progress using the same tools and processes. We have followed these practices since 2023, allowing us to monitor progress systematically and make informed instructional decisions. More to the point, the

supports we have in place have proven to be effective. Specifically, we continue to see a decrease in the number of Elementary students qualifying for reading support.



We can also see that most students held onto the gains they’ve made over time. Whether we view student outcomes by year or by cohort, we can see that the efforts of our Reading Specialists and the maintenance of tutor hours remain critically important.

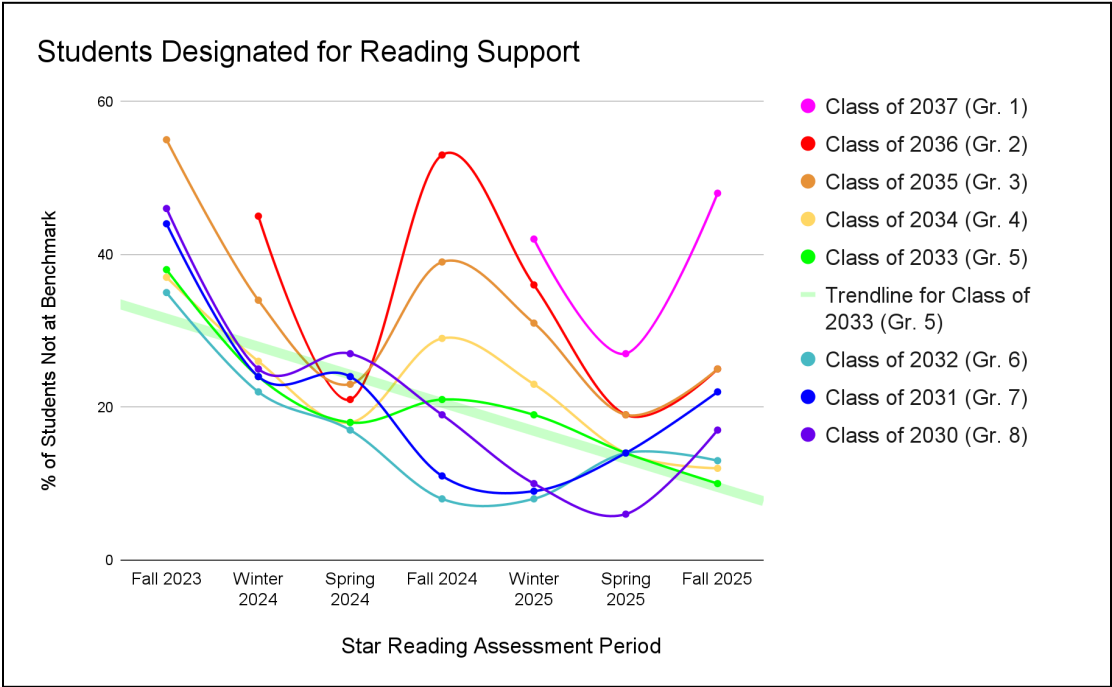


Year-to-Year Comparison at Fall Benchmark:
Fall 2024 to Fall 2025 Comparisons of Students Designated for Reading Support
 (based on Star Reading assessment data)

Grade	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Fall 2024	NA	53%	39%	29%	21%	8%	11%	19%	15%
Fall 2025	NA	48%	25%	25%	12%	10%	13%	22%	17%

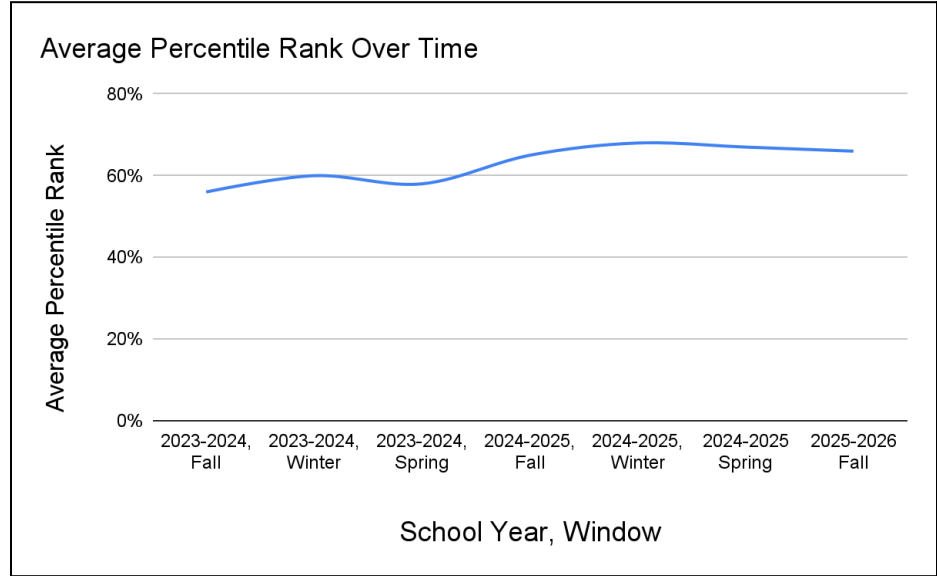
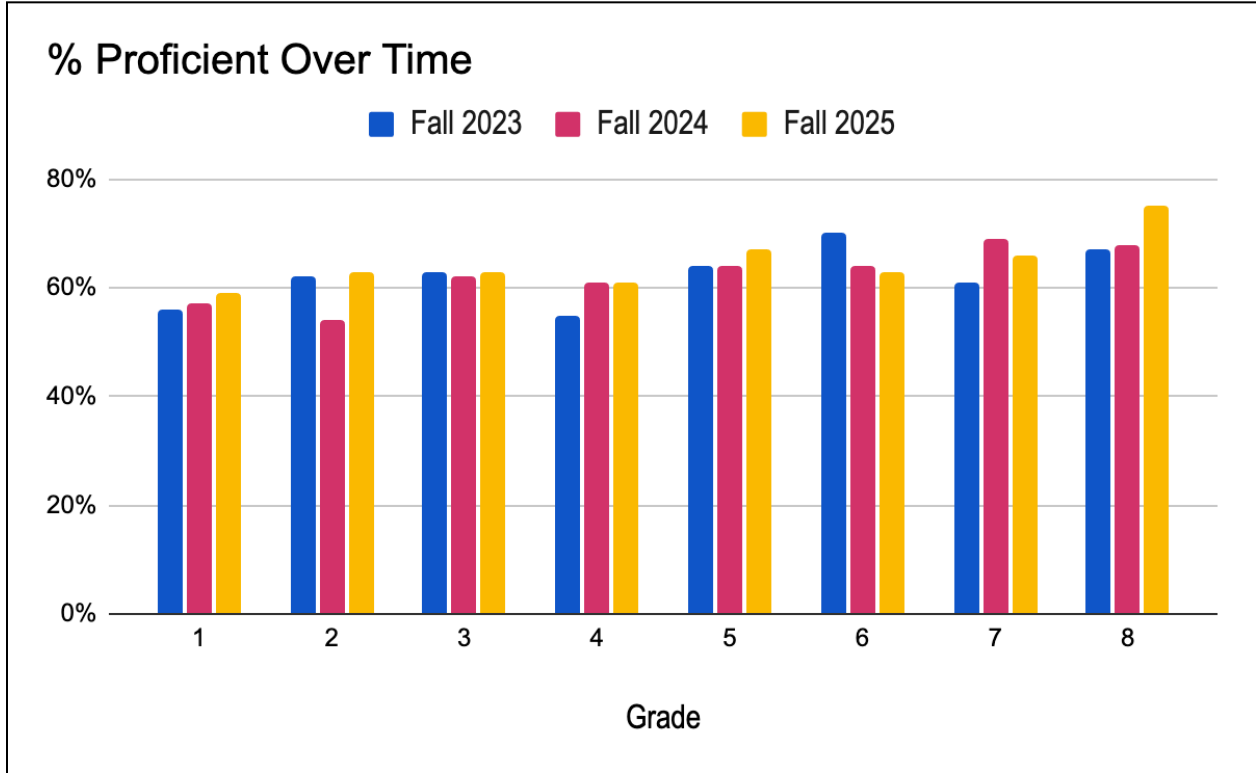
***Note:** The increase in students qualifying for reading support in Grade 7 is likely due to the fact that we are measuring oral reading fluency with a new tool (DIBELs vs Star Reading) because the latter is not normed for students beyond Grade 6.)

Across all grades we see a decline in the number of students needing reading support. Each of the colors below represents a grade level cohort of children, and illustrates their progress from September, 2023 to September, 2025.

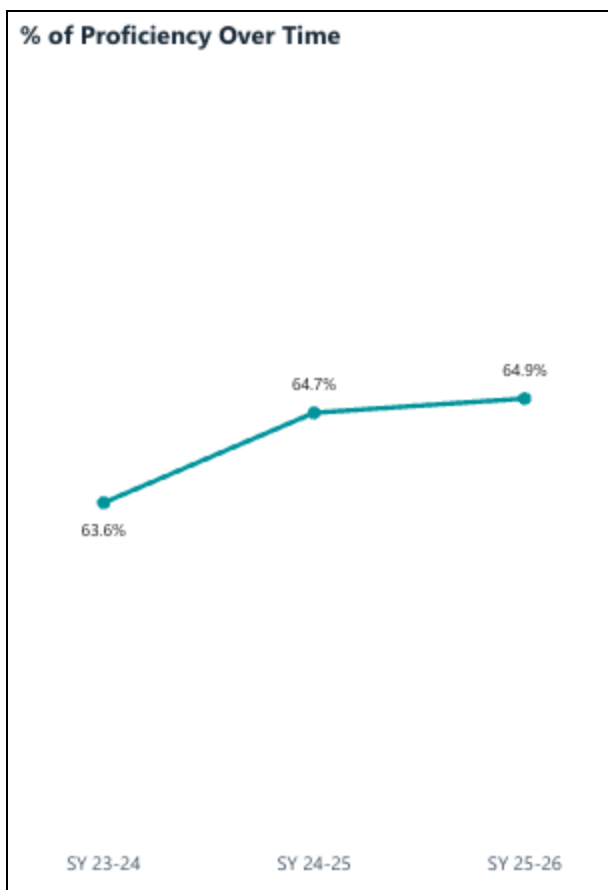


III. Building Reading Skills K-8

At most grade levels we’ve also seen a gradual increase in the number of students meeting grade level benchmarks at the elementary level, with mixed results at the middle level. In addition to monitoring individual student progress, Star Reading assessment results enable us to see various snapshots of each grade level’s performance.

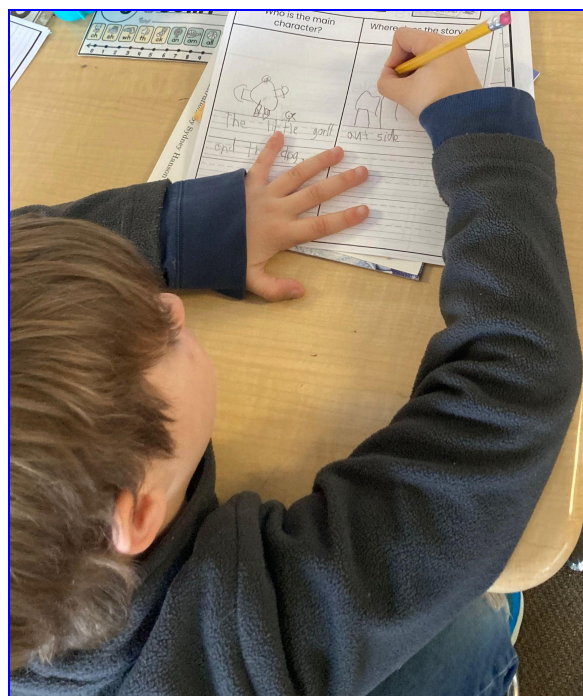
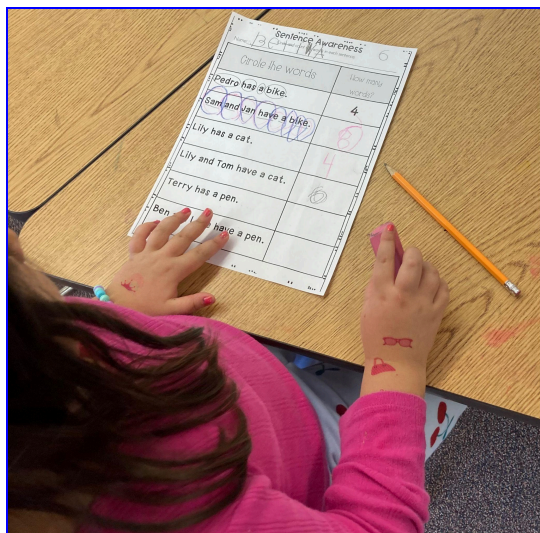


The chart on the left, for example, shows how K-8 students in Shrewsbury are performing on Star compared to their same-age peers across the nation.



The chart on the left shows the gradual increase in proficiency for all students in Grades 1-8 since 2023-2024.

As students grow, automaticity is required in more than one domain. A first grade student begins by developing a sense of ten before solving basic addition and subtraction problems, and literacy skills build in similar ways. For example, once students can read fluently, they must grapple with increasingly complex text. Mastery entails learning new vocabulary, understanding syntax, and decoding multisyllabic words.



Students practice skills in Grades K (left) and Grade 1 (right)

Consider these sample 2025 MCAS test questions given to the Grade 3:

Item Preview


Read the passage about the world's largest lizards. Then answer the questions that follow.

from *Komodo Dragons*

by Jill Sherman

A REAL-LIFE DRAGON

1 Lumbering out of the jungle comes the world's largest lizard. From its rounded snout, it flicks its long, forked tongue in and out of its mouth. Its massive body is covered in what looks like armor. Its long, sharp claws look as though they could rip anything apart. It's easy to see how this animal, the Komodo dragon, earned its name.



For this question, you will write an essay based on the passage(s). Your writing should:

- Present and develop a central idea.
- Provide evidence and/or details from the passage(s).
- Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Based on *Komodo Dragons*, write an essay that explains what physical characteristics help the Komodo dragon survive. Be sure to use information from the passage to develop your essay.

In the box below, the total space provided is equal to about one page.

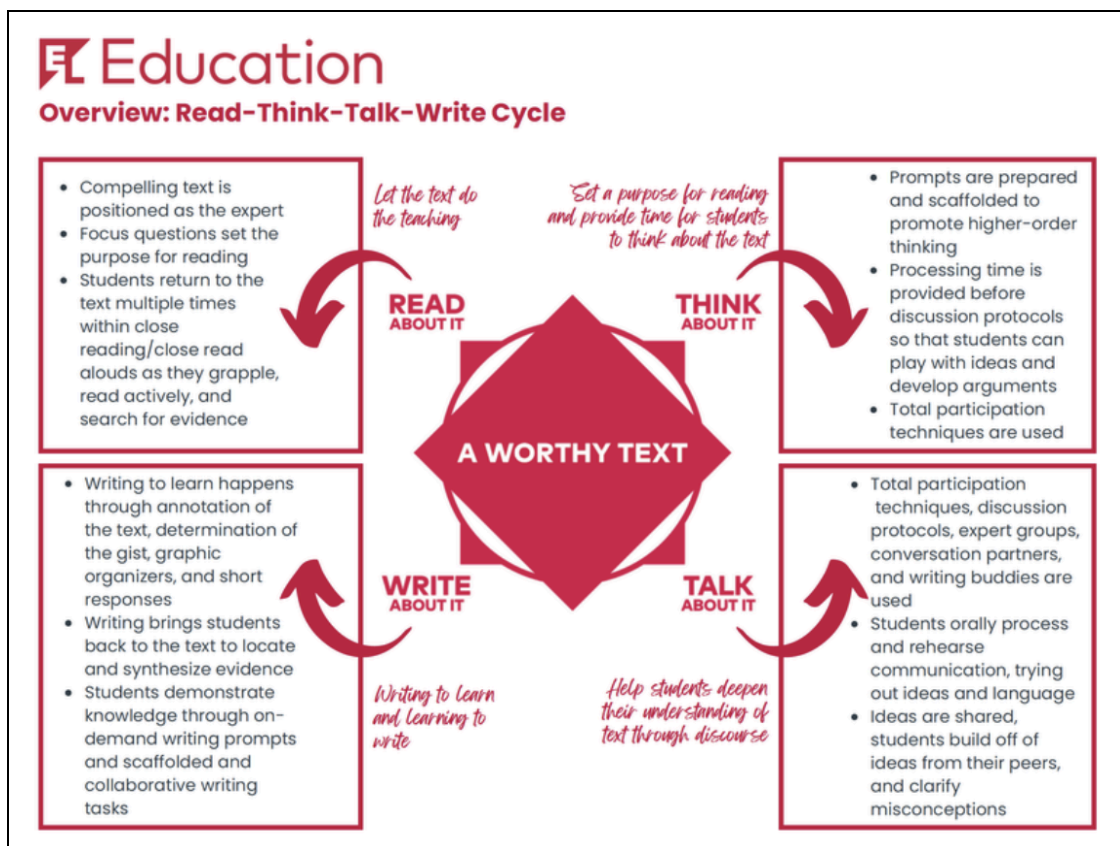
To complete the task, third graders must understand the terms ‘physical characteristics’ and ‘essay’ and reflect in writing about the text evidence in the passage as they develop a central idea. Fortunately, the curriculum we have chosen prepares students to find the “gist” of a passage and to support claims with evidence on a regular basis.

A classroom bulletin board decorated with a border of small illustrations. It features three large yellow sticky notes with text about a story, organized into 'In the Beginning...', 'In the Middle...', and 'In the End...' sections. Smaller sticky notes and cards are also attached, including one that says 'FINISH' and another that says 'Visible'.

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IV. Opportunities Ahead

So how will we prepare students for success in the year ahead? In addition to helping students to read well, educators must help children to generalize their learning to tackle test questions and to write with increasing independence. However, this does not require “MCAS practice” per se. Rather students must practice *reading* strategically. In EL Language Arts, one way the curriculum does this is by using a process called the Read, Think, Talk, Write cycle.



In Shrewsbury, we’ve found that when students have the opportunity to read and discuss a text together, they are more confident and better prepared to write in detail. Moreover, protocols for discussion enable students to practice speaking in complete sentences before they are required to write them.

V. Learning & Growth: It’s Not Just for Students

As mentioned in previous reports, with a new curriculum comes new learning for students *and* teachers alike. Sustaining the progress we’ve made in raising rates of student achievement means supporting teachers as they build cultures where students are comfortable with grappling, and helping our educators to release responsibility to students to read and write independently.

Our teachers will continue to need opportunities to become familiar with aspects of the EL Language Arts program- and time with colleagues to respond to new student needs. Last year the district's professional development and department meeting schedule allowed K-6 educators to gain familiarity with curriculum resources and to better understand the progression of units over the course of a year. This year we will devote fewer Early Release days to literacy in order to focus on other important strategic priorities related to student behavioral health. Instructional rounds continue to inform building-based professional learning, which is being carried out through department meetings, pod meetings, and small-group coaching.

V. Conclusion

Our schools remain committed to strengthening instructional practices and improving academic achievement outcomes. Ensuring that all our students reach proficiency in reading will require our collective and sustained efforts. Success will take several years, because growing new skills in students and teachers alike will take time.

I'm eager to continue advancing this strategic commitment, grateful to have your support and delighted that my work entails working with such talented learners. The work that our students are doing using the new literacy curriculum is inspiring and important, and I'm pleased to share their accomplishments with the larger community.

I look forward to answering your questions at your meeting next week.