

# 6 Ways to Foster a Culture of Literacy Leadership

A literacy leader cultivates an environment where educators feel empowered to provide personalized instruction to meet everyone's needs. As a result, students believe in their abilities to improve and develop the intrinsic motivation and passion they need to become lifelong learners.



According to [a study conducted by the Wallace Foundation](#), “leadership is second only to teaching among in-school influences on student success.” The researchers found little evidence of academic success without effective school leadership.

Additionally, [research shows that](#), when schools and districts prioritize literacy development, students achieve higher levels of overall academic success. Principals and district administrators have a responsibility to develop a culture of literacy to promote independent reading in their schools— and, in turn, improve overall student performance.

**So, what can you do to promote a culture of literacy among students and educators?**

## 1 Create a literacy plan

The acclaimed author and aviator [Antoine de Saint-Exupéry](#) once stated, “a goal without a plan is just a wish.” These words are especially true for achieving literacy goals in your building or district. Achieving your literacy goals requires an intentional and strategic implementation plan—especially if many of your students are reading well below grade level.

First, engage all district stakeholders—including teachers, administrators, families, students, and community partners—to determine specific student needs. Consider gathering information via online surveys, personal interviews, and focus groups. Compare current student outcomes with performance goals. You can use all of this information in concert to identify reading achievement gaps and determine where to prioritize.

Next, take inventory of pedagogical practices and reading interventions currently being used. Are any interventions or strategies not working the way they should be? Is PD necessary to help staff understand how to implement interventions? Be sure to achieve a full understanding of the current situation, use cases, and the downstream impact before retiring an intervention or adding a program to your district's toolbox.

Communicate an overarching literacy plan that clearly outlines your vision and mission to educators, parents, and students. As you plan your literacy initiative, consider research-backed solutions that develop reading skills for both proficient readers and those students in need of intervention.

## 2 Give your students choice and voice

Offering students choices about their learning increases motivation, engagement, and overall academic performance. Educators know that choice and control during reading instruction is especially important.

[In a study of more than 140,000 students](#), researchers found that students who reported higher levels of interest and confidence in their reading abilities also achieved significantly higher levels of reading growth. Therefore, the reading development program you choose for your school or district should consider the passions and interests of readers.

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Classroom teachers can achieve higher levels of reading motivation by providing a range of texts that expand students' interests and build background knowledge. By allowing students to select which topics and lessons to work on, they remain invested in the learning experience.

## 3 Use adaptive technology to scale differentiated instruction

Differentiated instruction is a student-centered approach to teaching that is designed to address the needs of all learners, regardless of their backgrounds or skill levels. By adapting instructional approaches to meet the needs of the individual learner, educators can improve reading achievement across the entire student population.

Many educators find that adaptive technology can successfully support instructional differentiation at scale. Adaptive technology captures each student's learning data as they work in the program and personalizes instruction by delivering in-the-moment scaffolding. Classroom teachers can quickly differentiate reading instruction to meet each student's needs by implementing adaptive reading programs. As a result, educators can provide the most effective and meaningful learning experiences for every student.



## 4 Emphasize evidence-based strategies and tools

Any literacy development tools or strategies leaders implement should be backed by extensive efficacy research and proof of their impact. This ensures you're investing your budget into interventions that have been proven to work.

Under the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#), school leaders are incentivized to prioritize evidence-based instructional tools and strategies to increase the impact of educational investments on academic achievement. Evidence for ESSA provides the most up-to-date and user-friendly review of research based on the ESSA tiers. Similarly, the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), established by the [Institute of Educational Sciences](#), uses tiered, evidence-based methods to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs.

Both DreamBox Reading programs are research based. DreamBox Reading Plus received an [ESSA Strong](#) rating for its research, demonstrating a significant impact on reading proficiency. The solution has also been proven effective across numerous [third-party studies](#).

## 5 Implement your literacy program with fidelity

Choosing a strong, evidence-based literacy intervention program for your school or district is an important first step in your literacy plan. But to actually achieve your literacy goals takes another critical step: You need to use the program as intended—[with fidelity](#)—to ensure maximum results.

To increase fidelity and ensure a successful implementation of the reading program, you will need to:

- ✓ Offer professional development for teachers to learn how and why to use the program
- ✓ Provide teachers with the resources and ongoing coaching they need to use the program effectively
- ✓ Continuously monitor student, classroom, building, and district performance data
- ✓ Adjust the literacy plan as needed to stay on track toward expected growth outcomes



Look for programs that provide [extensive professional development resources](#), tailored implementation support, and rich, actionable performance data for both teachers and administrators. Many programs have built-in reports that allow educators to track usage data, monitor progress, and inform instruction. By keeping an eye on these metrics, leaders can ensure that tools are being used and determine the return on their investment.

## 6 Motivate, motivate, motivate!

Research shows that motivation and reading success go hand in hand. A culture of safe, healthy, and confident learning gives students the intrinsic motivation they need to drastically improve their reading scores. Motivating students to actively participate in their own reading development—that is, developing intrinsic motivation in readers—is one of the most difficult tasks every literacy instructor faces.

A culture of safe, healthy, and confident learning builds motivation.

School leaders can help motivate students to read by employing district- and building-wide contests that reward students for reading. As mentioned earlier, another critical way to motivate students is by allowing them to choose to read content that inspires them. Educators know that students will put in their best effort when learning material that piques their curiosity or introduces new and exciting ideas. By providing students with diverse content that reflect their own lives and experiences and texts through which they can view the lives and experiences of others, they gain the ability to understand the world around them.