



Launching the Massachusetts Literacy Institute: Building Capacity for Reading Success

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) faced a pressing challenge: How to increase district capacity to ensure that all students in grades K-5 had access to high-quality, evidence-based literacy instruction. Without necessary support and structures in place, schools would be hindered in their ability to effectively implement evidence-based literacy instruction K-5.

To address this, DESE partnered with the Lead for Literacy Center, sister center of the National Center on Improving Literacy (NCIL), to help launch a new Massachusetts Literacy Institute. Designed specifically for elementary district and school leaders, the goal was to build organizational capacity to support the tools, training, and framework needed to implement evidence-based literacy instruction K-5 for fluent word reading and language comprehension within a Multi-Tiered System of Support for Reading (MTSS-R).

HOW NCIL FILLED THE NEED

Using NCIL's MTSS-R Implementation Guide, NCIL created a research-backed framework to assess DESE's current practices and develop practical "Literacy Action Plans" with concrete steps to address key areas such as fluent word reading, language comprehension, and high quality instruction.

Through seven, two-hour sessions, NCIL trained 15 district and school leadership teams on:

- Evidence-based literacy practices for K-5 to understand early indicators of reading challenges and improve reading outcomes.
- How to assess and strengthen their current instructional systems, from core instruction (Tier 1) to targeted interventions (Tiers 2 and 3).
- How to create actionable Literacy Action Plans that align with the MTSS-R framework.

The topics of the seven sessions were:

1. Literacy Leadership
2. Tier 1 (Core Instruction)
3. Tier 2 and 3 (Interventions)
4. Assessment
5. Data-Based Decision Making
6. Action Planning
7. District Presentations

Each session followed a consistent structure to maximize engagement and effectiveness:

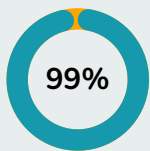
- Reflection and Sharing: District teams shared their progress and challenges.
- Expert Insights: NCIL presented research-based strategies for literacy leadership.
- Collaborative Planning: Teams worked together to apply new knowledge to their district plans.
- Action Steps: Participants received clear next steps to continue progress between sessions.
- Q&A Support: Optional 30-minute sessions offered tailored guidance.

RESULTS

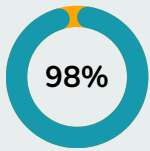
Through NCIL's training in the newly established Massachusetts Literacy Institute, each district team developed a Literacy Action Plan tailored specifically to their district's needs and incorporated the MTSS-R framework.

An evaluation survey was then issued to the Institute's participants to examine the degree to which the Institute built district capacity to understand, use, and implement evidence-based practices in literacy. Participants reported significant growth in two primary ways:

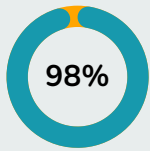
- **Improved Knowledge:** District and school leaders gained a deeper understanding of evidence-based literacy instruction for grades K-5.
- **Enhanced Systems:** Districts improved structures, processes, and procedures to support the implementation of evidence-based literacy instruction in grades K-5.



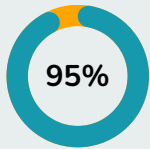
99% are likely to use this knowledge in their work or life.



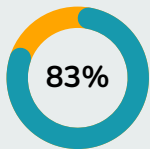
98% rated the quality of the NCIL service as Good, Very Good or Excellent.



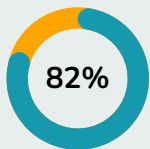
98% rated the relevance of the NCIL service as Relevant, Very Relevant or Extremely Relevant.



95% rated the usefulness of the NCIL service as Useful, Very Useful or Extremely Useful.



83% rated their understanding of evidence-based literacy instruction in K-5 as increased to a moderate, considerable or great extent.



82% responded that this service improved their knowledge of evidence-based approaches to screen, identify, and teach students with, or at risk for, literacy-related disabilities to a moderate, considerable or great extent.

IMPACT

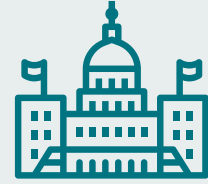
Reach



**70+ Educators and
Administrators**



**15 Local School
Districts**



**1 State Education
Agency**

Output



15 customized district literacy action plans grounded in the MTSS-R framework and a marketing video for the newly created institute.

Outcome



Increased district capacity to implement and sustain evidence-based literacy instruction K-5.

LESSONS LEARNED

The collaboration between NCIL and DESE revealed valuable insights for successful capacity-building initiatives.

Build Trust

1

- Foster open and honest communication in a non-threatening environment.
- Admit uncertainties and draw on shared expertise.
- Define roles and responsibilities clearly.
- Manage expectations of roles and responsibilities.

Collaborate

2

- Co-develop content, timelines, materials and processes for working together for efficiency and clarity.
- Co-present sessions to promote consistency.
- Schedule regular meetings to address challenges proactively.
- Encourage participants to work together on portions of the action plan during and between sessions.

Focus on Practicality and Relevancy

3

- Align each training session to the MTSS-R Implementation Guide for clarity and understanding.
- Balance theoretical knowledge with practical application.
- Customize sessions to connect to state-specific resources and other credible sources.
- Reconcile timing and content delivery restraints.

WHY IT MATTERS

NCIL's partnership with the Massachusetts DESE to create the Literacy Institute showed how actionable resources like the MTSS-R Implementation Checklist and targeted training can transform district-level literacy initiatives. By building capacity and aligning systems, the institute empowered leaders to create lasting improvements in reading outcomes for students across the state.