

## Three Fires Middle School

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The Three Fires Middle School represents the countywide program in adolescent literacy being supported by the Washtenaw Intermediate School District. Explicit instruction, teacher modeling, and thinkalouds play a key role in comprehension strategy instruction. Teachers do extensive work in metacognition throughout the content areas, and use metacognitive logs during text discussions.

Other text discussion techniques include talking to the text, making marginal notes, making predictions, keeping double-entry journals, helping students take apart difficult text, collaborative work, and pair-share. Reading is taught in the context of the subject areas, and vocabulary instruction is embedded in the context of each content area and through the context of reading.

Classroom environments show evidence of text discussion through an emphasis on small-group discussion activities, reading process analysis, and explicit teaching related to discussion strategies and guidelines and student use of self-questioning techniques. Teachers use a gradual release of responsibility in text discussion until discussions become more student-driven. Discussions focus on collaborative work, such as pair-shares with students, small table discussion, and whole-group share-out. The goal of this approach is to help students work on their own problem solving when reading difficult text.

This approach to teaching reading strategies has shown effectiveness, especially with those at risk, Title I, free and reduced-price lunch identification, and special education. Over the past two years, students have shown gains on the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) beyond the national norm, and in some classrooms gains have been between two and ten times that of the national norm.

Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD) is a regional educational service agency located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. It is one of Michigan's 57 regional educational service agencies created by law in 1962 to help schools provide quality programs for all students by maximizing district resources through the coordination of programs and services that are highly specialized or too expensive for any single school to operate, or that are very specialized

- ◆ Middle school (grades 6-8)
- ◆ 95% White
- ◆ 2% Hispanic
- ◆ 1% Black
- ◆ 1% Asian
- ◆ 1% Native American
- ◆ 16% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

and serve only a few students, including direct educational services for youth/adults with special needs from birth through age 26.

WISD partners with member school districts and public school academies in Ann Arbor, Chelsea, Dexter, Lincoln, Manchester, Milan, Saline, Whitmore Lake, Willow Run, and Ypsilanti, offering best-practice programs and services to assure that each child learns. It is responsible for 10 local public school districts in Washtenaw County and 5 public school districts in Livingston County, and works with upper elementary, middle, and high schools.

Services offered by the intermediate district include school improvement consultation, assessment services, and curriculum and instruction assistance to support improved student achievement. Consultation includes research assistance and resources including journals, books, curriculum materials, Internet access, videotapes, digital videodisks, computer software, and assistive technology.

WISD has implemented a systemic professional development model to help staff and leadership remain current in the field of education. This is done largely through participation in national, state, and local professional development activities, and often includes sharing WISD's best-practice programs with other educators via presentations at national, state, and local conferences. It strives to provide services and innovations that link research and practice to continuously improve student achievement.

The district is in its third year of implementing its countywide plan, *Engaging Students in Literate Thinking: A Blueprint for Adolescent Literacy Success*, which outlines critical research-based and effective instructional practices as well as infrastructure needs for successful student learning in fourth through twelfth grades. Work began by having representative staff from throughout the county look at data and pursue staff development. About 20 teachers, including two professional development coordinators, were trained in the adolescent literacy program. They followed up this training by meeting monthly and conducting observations in order to delve deeper into the work. Each year they have invited more teachers to be trained. Now, they have worked with about 250 teachers from all content areas. In addition, they meet with principals twice a year to help them support the work in their schools and the ongoing training that teachers receive.

The district has developed into a successful professional learning community that looks at what is being implemented in classrooms to further instructional practice and review student work with the aim of building capacity to use formative assessment to inform reading instruction. Washtenaw views its approach as bottom-up rather than top-down because training is initiated by interested teachers and not mandated.

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