

# Minnesota Reading Association Partners with State DOE to Provide Professional Development for Literacy Leaders of All Kinds



by Julianne Scullen

In these days of shrinking budgets, limited time, and tough choices, literacy leaders in Minnesota have begun the task of finding new ways to engage teachers in professional conversations. The Minnesota Reading Association (MRA) has partnered with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and the Minnesota Center for Reading Research (MCRR) to provide professional development for the state's literacy leaders in an initiative called Leadership in Reading Network (LiRN). Each year for the past three years, MRA and MDE have provided three full days of professional development to literacy leaders of all kinds. Classroom teachers, literacy coaches, reading specialists, district curriculum professionals, and administrators have gathered to

collaborate and learn together. This year MCRR joined LiRN to assist in providing theory into practice learning for members, and the initiative continues to grow.

Before conceiving of LiRN, MRA leaders realized that teachers attending workshops and conferences often return to their buildings with a plethora of good ideas, refreshed and energized, only to have their new ideas lost due to lack of time and support to make effective and strategic changes. School districts could not afford to send multiple teachers or teams of education professionals to

*A group meets to discuss LiRN*

workshops due to rising registration and substitute teacher cost. For this reason, MRA and MDE requested that LiRN participants bring a guest to each workshop in order to fully participate in the learning on that day and collaborate for future growth, and each guest's registration was provided free of charge.

For example, a past LiRN topic involved building a culture of literacy in a building

or district. Each participant was asked to bring an administrator to the workshop. After each learning session throughout the day, time and guidance was provided to promote meaningful and strategic conversations between members and their administrators. Teams were then able to return to their buildings or districts with new learning as well as plans to make the information useful immediately. More than one participant remarked that they were highly grateful for the opportunity to have the ear of their administrator for an extended period of time. They were able to begin the work of creating a shared vision for literacy.

Content area literacy instruction has also been a strong focus of LiRN members in the past. Guests of LiRN members included teachers of science, social studies, math, and other subjects. While LiRN members spent time collaborating and sharing ideas, content teachers were provided training in embedding literacy strategies into content curriculum by leaders in their own content or subject. Afterward, each team was given an opportunity to discuss how to make the information accessible to their entire staff.

This year's LiRN initiatives continue to emphasize high-interest topics. In November, the focus will be English Learners, and each participant has been asked to bring an ESL teacher or ESL specialist. In December, the focus will be Systems of Intervention and administrators will be the special guests of members. Allowing for teaming and collaboration at the moment learning is taking place is crucial. Teachers and other stakeholders learn and collaborate while they are together and in the same room.

Time for collaboration is crucial, but so is continuation of learning. As part of a member's registration fee, each is given a resource for their professional library each time LiRN meets. The resources are referenced by keynote speakers and presenters throughout the day. Past resources have included *Systems for Change in Literacy Education: A Guide to Professional Development* (2001) by Carol

A. Lyons and Gay Su Pinnell, *Teaching Reading Beyond the Primary Grades* (2007) by Marjorie Lipson, and *Subjects Matter* (2004) by Harvey Daniels and Steven Zemelman. It was found that utilizing the resources during the workshop enhanced learning, increased the likelihood of further reading and ensured the use of the information when the day was over.

Kari Ross, the Minnesota Department of Education Instructional Specialist for Reading, believes strongly in the partnership. "The Leadership in Reading Network (LiRN) is a long term commitment between the Minnesota Department of Education and the Minnesota Reading Association to support literacy leaders in our state."

Minnesota Reading Association President-Elect, Jen McCarty states "one of the best parts about this partnership is the bridge that is created between the research that MCRR brings and the practical application provided by MRA all in line with the intent of our Minnesota standards and statutes."

Ross adds, "This network and all of the collective partners offer participants a clear pathway of information from capital to classroom in order to better meet the needs of students and school systems that strive to continually enhance their literacy instructional practices. Our state agency, and our schools benefit from this partnership greatly. By working together to support our state's educators, we demonstrate the importance of collaboration and can better achieve our common goals of building leadership capacity and increasing student achievement."



*Kathy Cahill, retired reading specialist from the Minnesota Department of Education, collaborates with fellow LiRN members Justin Sperling and Lisa Paulson of Verndale Public Schools in Minnesota*

"The Leadership in Reading Network provides regular opportunities for PK-12 decision makers to learn from each other, be intimately connected to our state's reading professional organization, and stay informed about policy and state agency initiatives. This creates an environment of support and clarity that didn't exist before LiRN was established. The Minnesota Department of Education values the contributions and commitment of the Minnesota Reading Association and the Minnesota Center for Reading Research to support best reading practices across our state."

The Leadership in Reading Network, with its strong partnership and collaborative focus, is now established as a popular standard in Minnesota literacy professional development. Each year since its inception, facility capacity has been reached and a waiting list was needed.

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