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Spotlight on...Evidence-Based Responses

A pivotal shift reflected in Maine’s English language arts (ELA) standards is the emphasis on students gathering evidence from multiple sources in order to produce evidence-based responses. These responses can take many forms, including written arguments, informational texts, speeches or audio/visual presentations. Among the highest priorities of Maine’s ELA standards are that students be able to read, listen and view closely; build knowledge from sources; and support that knowledge with evidence from the sources, both orally and in writing. The shift toward evidence-based responses means less emphasis on responses that privilege prior knowledge and personal views. This does not mean eliminating personal responses, but instead means teaching purposeful decision making about how much personal response to incorporate and when to encourage it to enhance understanding.

Why is this shift critical to college and career readiness? According to Student Achievement Partners, “Most college and career writing requires students to take a position or inform others by citing evidence, not providing personal opinions. Across the grades, and even across the content areas, students need to develop the skill of grounding their responses in evidence from sources.” Developing students’ ability to gather and use evidence begins early in their school careers, through texts read aloud and oral discussions, and continues as they progress into content study in later grades and become increasingly proficient at analyzing and synthesizing evidence to build and communicate understanding.

This emphasis on gathering evidence and responding with evidence from sources is evident across Maine’s ELA standards. Reading Standard 1, Writing Standard 9, and Speaking and Listening Standards 2, 3 and 4 all focus on gathering, evaluating and presenting evidence from sources. Additionally, Writing Standards 1-3 (Text Types and Purposes) link to the use of evidence to support the development of central ideas and arguments. Further, Writing Standards 7 and 8 point to students developing ability to conduct research to gather and synthesize evidence across multiple sources.

“There are two kinds of writers: those that make you think, and those that make you wonder.”

~Brian Aldiss



“Words can be like X-rays if you use them properly – they’ll go through anything. You read and you’re pierced.”

~Aldous Huxley

What are some instructional implications for this shift? Educators can refine their instruction and support all students in developing proficiency by:

- Helping students build knowledge by providing opportunities to synthesize and analyze ideas and concepts across multiple sources.
- Presenting many opportunities to identify evidence from sources and to use that evidence in oral and written responses, including arguments, explanations and narratives.
- Using graphic organizers, illustrations and visual planning tools to capture evidence and organize for writing and talking the evidence.
- Engaging students in multiple short as well as more extended research projects.
- Teaching close reading/listening/viewing practices as well as note taking and citation skills.
- Providing time for collaborative conversations to discuss findings.
- Encouraging greater attention to responses (written and oral) that rely on evidence, rather than only experience.

Resources to support educators in helping students develop evidence-based responses can be found in the Online Resources and Professional Text sections below.

Online Resources

The following online resources provide tools for developing instruction that supports evidence-based response writing.

[Read Write Think](#)

This link to the National Council of Teachers of English/ International Reading Association's jointly produced Read-Write-Think cite will take you to a professional practice guide for helping students develop evidence-based arguments. Many other resources related to evidence-based responses can be found through this site.

[Better Lessons from NEA](#)

The National Education Association Master Teacher Project convened 130 highly skilled educators from across the country to develop lessons aligned to the College and Career Ready standards K-12. This site takes you to over 5,000 lessons designed for math and ELA that have posted to date. Many of these focus on evidence-based responses.

[PBS Learning Media](#)

PBS Learning Media, a partnership of PBS and WGBH Educational



Upcoming Professional Development from the Maine DOE

To explore potential training sessions that may be of interest, be sure to check our extensive list of professional development offerings at

www.maine.gov/doe/calendar/



Foundation, is a web-based resource that provides PreK-12 educators with access to free digital content for their classrooms designed to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement. More information about this resource can be found through a recent [Maine DOE Newsroom article](#).

Colorin' Colorado

This bilingual site for educators and families of English learners is full of helpful resources to support English learners. The link included here will take you to resources related to writing from sources and other considerations for writing instruction with English learners.

Professional Texts

Here are two professional texts that connect to the topic of evidence-based responses.

Powerful Content Connections: Nurturing Readers, Writers and Thinkers in Grades K-3

by Jennifer Altieri, 2014

The implementation of the ELA/Literacy standards means we have to rethink what we are teaching and how we teach it. Children are expected to dive deeper into more challenging texts, especially informational texts, right from the start of their school years. This book shows you how to create powerful connections that can strengthen primary-grade students' literacy skills while deepening their content knowledge. (Review from International Reading Association)

Close Reading and Writing from Sources

By Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, 2014

Fisher and Frey present a model for teaching middle and high school students some of the most crucial skills, often neglected, in today's schools: reading texts closely, taking good notes, analyzing and synthesizing information from multiple sources, then writing clearly and effectively. Videos linked throughout the text give you an opportunity to hear from teachers and students who have successfully implemented Fisher and Frey's ideas. (Review from International Reading Association)

Children's Literature

Annually, Maine students vote on two book honors that are awarded in the month of April. This year's winners of the Black Bear Book



“Good writing is like a windowpane.”

~George Orwell



Award and the Chickadee Award are noted below with a description of each award and the link to the websites at which information about the awards and details about how students can participate in determining the winners can be found.

Maine Student Book Award

The award is determined each year by participating Maine students in grades four through eight. The winning book is selected from a reading list that is compiled by the Maine State Book Award committee.

Wonder
By **R.J. Palacio**



Chickadee Award for Picture Books

The Chickadee Award is a picture book award program for Maine children in kindergarten through fourth grade. This award is given annually to one of 10 picture books nominated by a committee of teachers, librarians and early literacy professionals.

Jangles: A BIG Fish Story
By **David Shannon**



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