

**INTRODUCTION**

The PK-12 Language Arts Curriculum Guidelines is the product of the review and revision of the Archdiocese of Denver Language Arts Curriculum Guidelines published in 2001. The committee listed below studied current research and gathered information from Language Arts, Reading and English teachers. The committee changed some of the terminology of the previous document to reflect recent trends. They added specifics, especially in the area of Grammar and Mechanics which needed strengthening, but retained most of the rest of the document.

The committee made a significant addition to this document in the area of assessment. Using the Student Performance Objectives in each grade, the committee designed a Summative Project designed to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know and can do. The summative projects incorporate both the reading and the writing components of the guideline. Rubrics are provided for scoring of each project.

The value of a summative project as an integral part of the curriculum is two-fold: First, it provides to teachers, students, parents, administrators and other interested stakeholders a clear measure of student growth and learning success. The project allows students to integrate all the pieces of instruction from the school year into a comprehensive piece of work. It assists teachers in refining and focusing their instruction related to the performance objectives to ensure that all students achieve. Students are allowed to demonstrate competence and excellence in a format different from multiple choice standardized test formats, or textbook driven tests.

Second, it is linked directly to the objectives in the Archdiocese of Denver Catholic Schools curriculum. This allows for the use of a variety of published textbooks, supplemental materials, and teacher creativity to achieve performance objectives while providing for continuity across grades in individual schools and between the same grade in the many schools of the Archdiocese. It attempts to define acceptable levels of learning and achievement while providing for differentiation of ability among students.

The use of rubrics in instruction and assessment is a way to empower students as well as teachers. When students know the basis for assessment, they are more conscious that their efforts impact their learning and their grade directly. A grade is no longer a mysterious, magical award given arbitrarily by a teacher. Instead, the rubric becomes a check-list and a self-assessment resource and it is clear to all what level of assessment is due for this effort. A rubric also helps parents understand the qualifications for acceptable work, and helps to limit unrealistic expectations and “grade inflation.” It clearly focuses attention on what a student has learned and can do.

There is a concern about how the rubric score for the summative project affects a student’s grade. The committee considered this and offers the following suggestion:

*Although this should be a local level conversation and decision, our strong recommendation is that the summative project be independent of the student’s*

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*final grade. These projects are not intended to be “high stakes” assessments in the sense that grade placement, GPA, teacher salary, or teacher evaluation be linked to them. Instead, they are a way to ensure that the curriculum has been delivered, the performance objectives have been met, and that appropriate student learning has taken place. Other assessments of achievement and growth, like ITBS scores, do not impact a student’s grade or a teacher’s compensation in the Archdiocese of Denver Catholic Schools. Neither should the summative project.*

Teachers on the Language Arts Curriculum Committee and others in the schools they represent piloted the summative projects in their own classrooms. During the writing of the Language Arts Summative Projects, all schools were invited to pilot the projects and submit feedback. The committee incorporated many of the suggestions they received. Committee members also learned some things about their own teaching, and ways they could improve their own instruction based on their use of the project and the rubrics. The improvement of instruction is one of the main goals of the summative projects. This is one of the times when “teaching to the test” can be very productive. When teachers (and students) have a clear and concrete goal, it is easier to see how students will actually demonstrate their learning and growth in an area and they can revise or sharpen techniques and ways to practice so that students will be successful. It gives teachers and students an opportunity to practice the skills that will be assessed.

Some samples of grade level work have been included following the summative project. They are provided as examples of actual student work that responds to the project requirements. It is the expectation that from year to year, teachers will gather their own “anchor papers” for each level of the rubric so that they have samples for students in future classes, as well as comparative samples for future classes. Because one student’s work is much better than the work of the rest of the class in a given year, does not necessarily qualify it as outstanding when measured by the rubric. Although the expectation for grade level learning is clearly marked, and there are one or two levels above this to which student work may rise, there may be classes when no student completes work that is above grade level. In fact, in some years, it may be a struggle to get every student on grade level. But, the performance objectives are clear, and the project rubric has specific parameters, so it is helpful for a teacher to have samples from previous classes so that she does not evaluate the projects with a bell curve of distribution in mind.

The samples also provide helpful standards between schools for grade level work. All elementary schools in the Archdiocese of Denver should have a similar standard of mastery compared to the rubric, and not necessarily compared to the local school and students in their own class. All students should strive to achieve to these expectations and it is helpful to provide a constant for this purpose.

The curriculum model supports an integrated language arts program. Teachers and administrators should continue to integrate the development of student language in all areas of

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school curriculum. Although integration is encouraged, educators must be certain that children are developing discreet skills in all areas of language development.

The success of a language arts program depends upon the commitment of the teacher. Teachers must provide proper modeling, and expect proper use of the English language, in written and spoken forms. Time for instruction and practice with adequate feedback is important. Where instruction is departmentalized, all teachers should be familiar with grade-level requirements and ensure that this level of literacy is practiced in all subject areas.

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