

Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy

The Partnership Logo

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy (PCL) is a school-reform model dedicated to increasing student achievement. The model uses literacy as a tool for measuring school improvement in four related areas: student learning, teacher perceptions, school climate, and school processes. The logo of the interlocking diamonds symbolizes the dynamic, continuous relationship between a school's literacy program and the educational agencies and policies that influence school improvement. The first diamond represents the relationship of four essential components within the school: classroom literacy framework, school-embedded professional development, intervention programs for struggling learners, and accountability and research. The second diamond represents the relationship between four educational agencies: public school, university, state education department, and state legislators. The power of the UALR model is symbolized in a partnership design that acknowledges school change as a dynamic, continuous process that requires commitment and collaboration at many levels. The University of Arkansas at Little Rock is recognized as a national leader in literacy reform. A significant number of school districts in Arkansas and across the United States have partnered with UALR in implementing the Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy Model.

A History of Partnerships

In 1990, with support from the Arkansas State Legislature, UALR became a university training center for Reading Recovery. Three years later, Dr. Linda Dorn, UALR Trainer developed a Comprehensive Intervention Model (CIM) to include a menu of supplemental services for struggling learners in the elementary grades.

Since 1993, UALR leaders have researched and refined this design, which has become the cornerstone of the Arkansas Comprehensive Intervention Model. In 1999, UALR developed the Arkansas Comprehensive Literacy Model (CLM), which included the training of school-based literacy coaches. With grant support from the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE), the model was piloted in seven high poverty schools with an average poverty level of 60 percent. At the end of the pilot year, first grade students had made significant gains on benchmark assessments and standardized tests. Based on these results, the ADE's literacy initiatives have utilized components of the Arkansas Comprehensive Literacy Model in their professional development models: classroom literacy framework, early intervention programs, assessment walls, team meetings, and literacy coaches. UALR's historical journey of literacy partnerships has expanded beyond Arkansas, across the United States, and abroad. In 2005, the name Arkansas Comprehensive Literacy Model was changed to Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy (PCL) to acknowledge this international network of literacy partners.

An essential element of the PCL model is the training of literacy coaches. Since 1999, UALR has offered a specialized program of study for the preparation of literacy coaches. UALR is an NCATE accredited university where teachers can receive training for a certificate diploma as a literacy coach. The UALR program, which meets the professional standards of the International Reading Association, includes preparation in four critical areas: 1) literacy instruction and assessment, 2) supervision and coordination of a school's literacy program, 3) coaching and mentoring teachers, and 4) research in language and literacy-related areas. Using an apprenticeship framework, literacy coaches work in a school setting at the same time they are being trained. The UALR training staff conducts site visits to observe the literacy coach in all aspects of the coaching role: 1) teaching children, 2) coaching teachers, 3) conducting professional development, and 4) analyzing and reporting on school data.

In comprehensive literacy schools, the data are studied to determine progression over time in four related areas: demographics, perceptions, processes, and achievement. Literacy team meetings provide a collaborative context for analyzing school data, identifying problems, posing solutions, evaluating choices, and making recommendations. Intervention team meetings are used to review student data and select appropriate interventions that include Reading Recovery for the most tangled first grades and small group services for other needy students. Progress monitoring, program evaluation, and school plans are critical components of a comprehensive literacy model for continuous school improvement.

A goal of the Partnerships in Comprehensive Literacy model is to develop a seamless transition across school programs, curriculum approaches, and assessment systems. An emphasis is placed on creating professional communities within schools where teachers collaborate on teaching and learning issues. Since 1999, the PCL model has been replicated in over 100 K-6 schools across Arkansas and the United States. In 2005, the elementary design was refined to include training for middle schools with plans to extend the design to the secondary levels.