Literacy Tips

1. The Forms of Literacy

In the past, **literacy** simply referred to the ability to read and write. A person was either literate or illiterate. This idea has changed in the last two decades due to new research. We are also continually encountering new technologies and learning about their applications in everyday life. Literacy has come to not only mean reading and writing, but also competence in some field of knowledge, and in schools, we now speak of a variety of types of literacy, including visual literacy, digital literacy and literacy as it relates to math skills.

Reading and Writing

Literacy, as measured by skill in reading and writing, is the basis of a person's education. Junior high students must read to learn about the world they live in. They need to write to clarify their thinking and communicate that thinking to others. Students are expected to have sufficient reading skill to read the texts, essays, novels, plays, short stories and poetry in the curriculum. They're required to demonstrate their understanding of what they study by writing paragraphs, essays and exams in all subject areas. This form of literacy serves as the foundation for a student's academic achievement.

Visual Literacy

If we consider the idea that visual images are a language, then our work involves assisting students to be able to "read" visual content—to not only understand the thoughts, ideas and information presented in the form of a photograph, painting, chart, graphic, 3D model or icon, but to also understand the message it's conveying. Visual literacy involves helping students to "write" or create images as well, so that they can visually represent their own ideas, thoughts and messages. We're living in a world that's filled with more visual forms than ever before, so it's important that we can find ways to help our learners think critically about the thousands of images they see daily.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is the ability for all students to use digital tools to effectively communicate, create and share information in the 21st century. During the junior high years, students are asked to:

- Use audio, video and digital equipment.
- Manage and organize documents and data.
- Create multimedia presentations.
- Create and use databases and spreadsheets.
- Create computer graphs.
- Use a scientific calculator or computer to solve problems.
- Create a web page.
- Use the Internet and other online networks.
- Effectively search for information to support their learning.
- Demonstrate positive digital citizenship.

Junior high schools provide students with more opportunities to pursue an interest in computers through option classes and more use of computer-assisted learning. Students can learn keyboarding skills for efficiency and can master software applications. They also need to learn to use the computer as a library research tool, since most library collections are now accessible by computer.

Math and Numeracy Skills

Gone are the days when students were only required to carry out the basic operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division and solve word problems.

Students are now also expected to show proficiency in mental math processes and use different strategies, visually and through print. In addition, they have to explain and communicate their own thinking and to understand the structures that support math reasoning. Communication of math learning and familiarity with the language of math are key features in the math curricula of today. Students must also employ numeracy skills to construct and communicate meaning.

Some final thoughts…

A student's success in school is based, to a large degree, on how well the student achieves balance and expertise in all many facets of literacy, including reading, writing, math and digital and visual literacy. Our goal is to help them achieve a balance in developing their skills in each of these areas. We're focused on ensuring the knowledge they acquire now creates a foundation for their future success. We live in a dynamic, ever changing world that offers amazing opportunities to learn, progress, and innovate. We want to see our students make the most of these opportunities.