

Position Statements Written by OCTELA:

Censorship:

- In support of the consistent opposition of the National Council of Teachers of English to unjustified removal of books from schools and colleges; and in awareness that uncritical censorship of books continues unabated,

Be it resolved that

Books used in the public schools of Ohio should continue to be chosen by teachers, librarians, and administrators of local school districts, under the authority of the school board, to meet the educational needs of the serious student and the maturing mind; and

Pressure to restrict the choice of local schools or to remove books so selected from classroom use or the shelves of the school library should be resisted, whether the pressure comes from local or state levels; and

OCTELA send copies of this resolution to the State Board of Education, to the editors of the OEA Journal and the School Board Journal, to NCTE, and to the editors of daily newspapers in Ohio.

People of Color:

- It is the policy of the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts to be representative of the increased cultural diversity of our schools and universities. The recruitment, retention, and active leadership of people of color in OCTELA will contribute to the diversity of the organization's membership. A diverse membership will increase the effectiveness of OCTELA in a nation where the majority of students by the year 2000 will be people of color.

Be it resolved that

- OCTELA and local affiliates will provide increased representation of people of color at all possible levels of the organization through recruitment, retention, and involvement;
- OCTELA will provide its members with workshops and convention sessions that address the concerns of people of color presented by people of color;
- OCTELA will link with the efforts of other organizations whose activities address the educational concerns of people of color;
- OCTELA support the use of resources that are representative and inclusive of people of color and their contributions; and
- OCTELA's verbal and visual materials will reflect its inclusiveness.

OCTELA Supports NCTE's Position on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Issues in Academic Studies as Part of Teacher Preparation Programs/2007

Background:

- The policies of the National Council of Teachers of English have always supported fair and democratic schooling in a diverse society. The NCTE Resolution on Diversity (1999) calls on the Council to “affirm, seek, and encourage all teachers to include a diversity of perspectives, cultures, aesthetic responses, and experiences in the teaching and learning of English language arts.” More discussion of multicultural issues, bigotry, and intolerance has been incorporated into teacher preparation programs in the last decade. These discussions, however, typically omit or give only cursory attention to LGBT issues even though people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities belong to all racial, ethnic, social class, and ability groups.
- The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducts a National School Climate Survey every two years. The latest survey, conducted in 2005 and published in 2006, shows that LGBT students continue to feel marginalized within their school communities. Fully 64% of the LGBT students surveyed report feeling unsafe in their schools. Respondents report that not only do teachers frequently fail to address homophobic remarks when they hear them, but that sometimes the remarks actually come from the teachers themselves.
- Effective teacher preparation programs help new teachers understand and meet their professional responsibilities, even when ideas about social justice arise that can seem in conflict with personal beliefs. It is the job of such programs to ensure that new teachers are prepared for any situations they might encounter in their classrooms. Secondary and post-secondary teachers are almost certain to find LGBT young adults, adults, and children of LGBT families in their classrooms. Elementary teachers are most likely to find themselves teaching students who are the children of same-sex parents. Although the recent revision of NCATE standards waters down any attention paid to LGBT issues in teacher education and does not directly require attention to LGBT issues, all teachers are charged with the responsibility to prepare students for responsible citizenship in a diverse society.

Be it therefore

RESOLVED, that the National Council of Teachers of English

- proactively support the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues as a part of all teacher preparation programs;

- urge NCATE to require knowledge of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues as a requirement for teacher certification.
- urge NCTE members to incorporate LGBT issues into their multicultural work in schools;
- urge the three conferences within NCTE: CEE, CEL, and CCC to continue to be inclusive of LGBT issues;
- urge the NCTE Editorial Board to be proactive in seeking good work in gay and lesbian studies for publication and, where relevant, assist other NCTE authors to draw out some of the queer studies implications of their work.

OCTELA Position Statement on the Use of Vocabulary Lists to Improve Assessment Performance:

- In response to efforts to implement the use of grade-level vocabulary lists to improve assessment performance, OCTELA puts forth the following position statement:
- OCTELA believes that state-wide grade level vocabulary lists are counter-intuitive to the natural acquisition of language. Learning of language in isolation of context is not supported by research-based literacy instruction. Rote memorization of vocabulary is not authentic learning. Learning occurs through exposure to rich, multi-modal texts. Any such lists reproduce social, cultural and linguistic biases that fail to validate the diversity of Ohio students. In addition, any such lists fail to recognize the rapidly evolving nature of language. Rather than prepare our students to learn language for their own purposes and real-world experiences, vocabulary lists provide isolated word study which fails to provide students with critical skills necessary for transferability within multiple contexts. The development of assessment materials must be reflective of dynamic vocabulary and contextually-based word study.

OCTELA Position Statement on the Governor's Commission on Teaching Success/January, 2002:

- OCTELA supports high standards for insuring that Ohio's teachers are served by the best possible teachers and administrators. We applaud that the Governor's Commission on Teaching Success will be examining the issues surrounding teacher and administrator recruitment and retention. We are also pleased that this Commission has a deadline of December, 2002 and thus will have more time to work than did the Governor's Commission on Student Success.
- We are concerned, however, that the current Commission's work be led by Ohio educators and not by consultants from other states. We are concerned that the work of the previous Commission (Governor's Commission on Student Success) was provided overall analysis and direction from organizations such as Achieve, Inc. Though we certainly recognize the value of using national consultants and models from other states as references and resources, we believe that Ohio's teachers and our own nationally known education experts have the talent and expertise not just to revise, but to lead, create and evaluate our own policies on teacher and administrator success.
- What follows is OCTELA's position on each of the four major areas to be examined by the Governor's Commission on Teaching Success.

Recruitment and Teacher Preparation

- OCTELA supports the effort to recruit and retain the best and the brightest people to go into the teaching profession. We believe that Ohio's students are best served, however, by those who have at least a Bachelor's Degree in Education (including academic teachers in a vocational setting). We know more now about teaching and learning than we have ever known. To expect people to teach children without any knowledge of current "best practices" is to do a disservice to Ohio's children. We support teacher education programs that emphasize: learning-centered approaches, professional responsibility and accountability, reflective practice, and affirmation of, and responsiveness to, differences.

Induction, Support and Retention

- The statistics on the numbers of new teachers who leave the profession within the first five years are startling. OCTELA supports efforts to support and retain new teachers, not by punitive and "corrective" mentoring programs that supposedly hold new teachers "accountable." Rather, OCTELA supports mentoring programs that would, instead create communities of inquiry, with caring professionals, both

experienced and non-experienced, coming together to critically examine and extend professional knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning, school practices, and the social purposes of education. These communities of inquiry would be of great benefit to those new teachers who are struggling with the first years.

Ongoing Professional Development

- OCTELA affirms the essential role that ongoing professional development plays in the growth of all educators. Professional development is extremely useful. Resources committed to changes in teacher thinking and practices do affect change. However, change is also difficult both individually and systemically.
- Ongoing professional development must be designed to meet the needs of teachers and students and not in reaction to a top-down mandate from district leaders. High quality professional development is characterized by: having a foundation based in research on teaching and learning; intensive and sustained support; follow-up that is appropriate to teachers' needs in the context of practice; opportunities and tools for reflection; conversation, discussion, and collaboration aimed at deliberation, dialogue, and negotiation; and voluntary participation or some levels of choice. Such professional development might revolve around a book club/study group model or encouraging teachers to keep and evaluate reflective journals and/or their own professional portfolios.'

School Leadership

- OCTELA supports school restructuring that allows and encourages school administrators to truly be the instructional leaders of their buildings. As well as for teachers, we must provide professional development for administrators that nurtures their growth as members of a community of inquiry. This ongoing mentoring and support for administrators must be structured so as to provide them with the utmost in support and scaffolding so that they do not burnout under the staggering demands of school administration.
- OCTELA willingly volunteers its expertise and experience to work on Ohio's future developments in teacher and administrator success. OCTELA supports models of teacher and administrator training and professional development that emphasize a solid research base of what we know about teaching and learning and a structure of ongoing professional development that will support our newest professional educators.

OCTELA Position Statement on Assessment/March 2000

- OCTELA supports assessment and evaluation. However, most testing by its nature presumes that some will pass and some will fail. We are opposed to high stakes testing that sorts districts and students into winners and losers. We oppose labeling children as failures for the adult inadequacies of poor teaching, poor parenting and/ or a poor environment.
- OCTELA believes that all children can learn. However, we know that children do not learn at the same rate, the same time or under the same circumstances. Children have a wide diversity of talents, experiences, goals and needs. Assessment should be of varying styles and types over a developmentally appropriate band of time in order for each child to meet his or her individual potential.
- OCTELA believes in continuous growth and improvement over time. “The issue is not tests per se, but our failure to be results oriented” (Grant Wiggins). Educators need the data from tests to measure growth and need. Just working harder is not enough of a direction. We need specific information from assessments to self-correct, change course, and emphasize areas of need and also of success.
- OCTELA believes that state mandated assessments have yet to go to the last, most important step. School districts and teachers need to use the information from assessments in a more productive manner. We need a professional teaching culture that emphasizes shared responsibility for reflective teaching, continual student improvement, and not simply high scores at certain grades (Dennie Palmer Wolf and Ann Marie White).

OCTELA Recommends :

- That testing results be used in a more productive manner:
 1. Focus professional development on data collection (What’s of value?), data analysis (How do I interpret this?) and action (How do I use this information to change teaching strategies?). Think about “data mentors” and professional systems that train and support people to accurately interpret data from tests, track sample populations or track sample test questions, to make informed decisions about what very specifically to teach, what specifically to ask parents to help with and what specifically a community can do to help its children.
 2. Include teachers in the process. Many teachers will say “No more testing,” but some of those same teachers will tell you that they are hungry for the opportunity to talk with skilled and experienced colleagues when given the time to talk about their students’ performances. Analyzing data from a test should become a building and

district directive to collaboratively develop quality teaching strategies and assignments to meet areas of poor results and celebrate areas of success.

3. Focus on the progress and growth in individual children. Use multiple assessment tools including State mandated testing to track and assist children in meeting standards.

OCTELA Position Statement on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)/2008

- OCTELA joins the Ohio Board of Regents, the Ohio Department of Education, and the Ohio legislature in promoting the improvement of the teaching of science and math and in encouraging study in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).
- OCTELA believes that the priorities of STEM—problem-solving, independent thinking, innovation, and literacy—are also the priorities of English/language arts (ELA) and that the foundation for building knowledge in STEM disciplines is based in the language arts and human sciences. Developing communication strategies, navigating texts, synthesizing and manipulating ideas and data, accessing information, and critical thinking are literacies shared with English/language arts and the other core academic content areas in Ohio. To encourage the strength of interdisciplinary instruction in all academic content areas, *OCTELA recommends that STEM initiatives serve to strengthen the relationships among Ohio’s core disciplines, rather than create exclusionary models of STEM-focused curricula.*
- *New STEM-specialized schools are neither necessary nor desired to achieve these goals.* Because technology is important to building knowledge in our global society, access to it must be equitable and not exclusionary. To fully utilize technology, however, all children must be competent readers and writers, and all teachers must work to integrate, not isolate, the literacy skills of their disciplines that will enable all students to express themselves and build upon their understandings of the world.
- For many years, ELA educators have worked to move away from viewing content knowledge as information to be passed on and as a limited set of skills to be mastered in discrete content “silos.” Instead, *OCTELA endorses a constructivist approach to learning where teachers plan active, learner-centered opportunities for students to exercise reading, writing, and thinking processes and problem-solving skills, while engaging in inquiry and innovation in all of the core academic content areas.*

OCTELA Position Statement On the Standardization of English Language Arts Instruction/February, 2005

- OCTELA supports high standards for literacy for Ohio’s PK- 12 students. However, the standardization of literacy education delivery has caused us concern.
- OCTELA strongly supports timely and carefully produced curriculum goals and objectives (commonly referred to since the 1990s as “standards”). However, we are concerned that the increasing emphasis on standardized delivery of these curriculum goals and objectives endangers differentiated instruction and the ability of teachers to use their professional knowledge about their students’ learning differences to inform instructional decision making. We are concerned about increased rigid schedules of instruction being enforced in some districts that interpret standards and benchmarks through scripted instruction. Teachers no longer have the option to pace instruction based on their students’ needs or to re-teach when necessary. Highly qualified teachers should make instructional decisions based on their professional knowledge. **We believe that Ohio’s teachers have the talent and expertise to shape appropriate literacy instruction in their classrooms.**
- OCTELA strongly supports research which shows that students at all levels need contextualized, meaningful, and relevant literacy instruction using texts broadly defined (including print and nonprint texts) in order to improve reading and writing skills. We also believe that students must have some choice built into their reading and writing practices. **We believe that, while we use standards to set our curriculum and instruction goals, there must be room for student choice and relevancy.**
- In Ohio’s current atmosphere of high stakes testing – tests that determine grade promotion and graduation- academic content standards may unfortunately be interpreted as the ONLY items that need to be taught. Effective assessment not only sums up what a child knows and is able to do at any one time during the school year, but it should also help form decisions regarding future instruction for the child’s continuing literacy development. **We believe that by standardizing all assessment, literacy educators will miss many subtleties of the portraits of the literacy lives of their students, often limiting instruction to items that can be easily tested with paper and pencil and leading to teaching for coverage rather than teaching for understanding.**
- Realizing that a “one-size-fits-all” literacy education would end up being of benefit to very few (if any) students, OCTELA supports standards without standardization that are ultimately interpreted and carried out by Ohio educators. OCTELA supports literacy instruction that insures that each one of Ohio’s PK-12 students becomes a competent, lifelong reader and writer.

NCTE Position Statements Supported by OCTELA:

Since some of these resolutions/position statements from NCTE are quite lengthy, I'm giving you only the highlights and the URL where you can read them in full.

1. On Writing: <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/writingbeliefs>

- Everyone has the capacity to write, writing can be taught, and teachers can help students become better writers
- People learn to write by writing
- Writing is a process
- Writing is a tool for thinking
- Writing grows out of many different purposes
- Conventions of finished and edited texts are important to readers and therefore to writers
- Writing and reading are related
- Writing has a complex relationship to talk
- Literate practices are embedded in complicated social relationships
- Composing occurs in different modalities and technologies

- Assessment of writing involves complex, informed, human judgment

2. On Professional Development:

<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/profdevelopment>

- Professional development of teachers/faculty is a central factor leading to student success.
- Professional development treats teachers/faculty members as the professionals they are.
- Professional development supports teachers/faculty at all levels of expertise; its value is confirmed by external validation.
- Professional development relies on a rich mix of resources, including a theoretical and philosophical base; a research base; and illustrations of good practices.
- Professional development can take many different forms and employs various modes of engagement.
- The best models of professional development—best in the sense of enhancing first, teacher practice leading to second, student learning—are characterized by sustained activities, by engagement with administrators, and by community-based learning.
- Professional development is systematically reviewed with evidence of efficacy provided by a review process including multiple stakeholders and NCTE’s own research.

3. On the Essential Roles and Value of Literature in the Curriculum

<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/valueofliterature>

- Resolved, that the National Council of Teachers of English continue to affirm the
 - value of reading and literature for appreciation, learning, and enjoyment;
 - critical need of instilling in young people a love of literature and reading for its own sake;
 - important and critical roles that children’s and young adult literature should play in the classroom; and
 - that NCTE recommend that
- reading curricula focus on selecting, reading, responding to, and analyzing a wide range of literature;

- a wide range of high-quality literature representing diverse experiences and perspectives be integrated into all content areas, including reading instruction;
- students engage in deep and extended experiences with full authentic texts rather than with adaptations; and
- students are guaranteed opportunities to select literature representing a variety of topics and degrees of difficulty.

4. **On 21st Century Literacies**

<http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/21stcentdefinition>

Adopted by the NCTE Executive Committee, February 15, 2008

- Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies—from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms—are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities and social trajectories of individuals and groups.

Twenty-first century readers and writers need to

- Develop proficiency with the tools of technology
- Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes
- Manage, analyze and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multi-media texts
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments

Statement for the Press regarding the current issue with integrating English language arts:

Position Statement: OCTELA supports authentic integrated English language arts.