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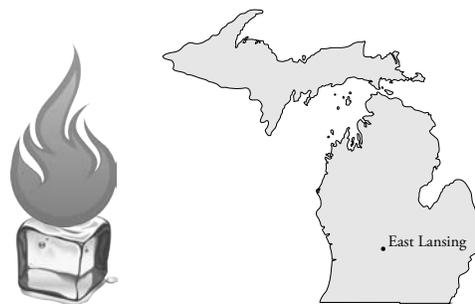
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# What's Hot and What's Not in Michigan: Improving Literacy across the State

by Laura J. Hopkins,  
Kristen L. White,  
Tanya S. Wright,  
and Patricia A. Edwards



The *Michigan Reading Journal* serves more than 2,000 classroom teachers, literacy specialists, educational leaders, teacher educators, and university faculty both within and outside of the state of Michigan. For the past year, as a new editorial team, we have intentionally published practitioner-focused articles, selecting topics we felt were both timely and relevant to Michigan teachers. To better serve our enthusiastic and growing readership on a range of diverse topics related to literacy, we developed and administered a *What's Hot* survey. More specifically, we aimed to understand our readers and their interests in order to tailor the journal to our audience.

## Who Responded?

In January 2015, the Michigan Reading Association sent the *What's Hot* survey via email to our readership. The survey asked readers to rate a number of literacy topics based on their perceptions of how *hot* the topics are or should be in the state of Michigan. We received 149 complete responses from various regions of the state. The majority of respondents were classroom teachers. We also heard from literacy coaches, administrators, intervention teachers, teacher educators, and authors. In this article, we

will discuss our survey results, highlighting the top responses each of the four areas the survey covered. Next we discuss what's hot and what's not hot in literacy in Michigan according to you, our readers.

## What Did We Learn?

### What's Hot in Literacy in Michigan?

*Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts* (CCSS) was the hottest topic and was rated as *hot* by 92% of respondents. Interestingly, eight of the remaining top ten *hot* topics are related to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). For example, *close or deep reading*, which ranked as the second hottest topic and was rated as *hot* by 81% of the respondents, and *college and career readiness*, which came in third at 70%, are both related to the CCSS. Table 1 provides a complete listing of the top ten *hot* topics in literacy in Michigan, broken down by the percentage of responders who selected this topic. The only topic among the top ten that is not directly related to the CCSS is *RTI/differentiated instruction*. However, the multiple tiers of differentiated instruction that comprise RTI/MTSS are necessary to help all children meet the CCSS.

Table 1

Topic	% who rated this topic as <i>HOT</i>
1- Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts	91.85%
2- High-stakes assessment	81.15%
3- Close reading/deep reading	81.06%
4- Informational/nonfiction texts	78.86%
5- College and career readiness	70.00%
6- Writing: argumentative	68.80%
7- Response to Intervention (RTI)/Differentiated instruction	67.20%
8- Comprehension	66.42%
9- Critical Reading and writing	64.39%
10- Adolescent Literacy	64.34%

### What’s Not Hot in Literacy in Michigan?

The majority of respondents rated *creative writing* and *genre knowledge and instruction* as *not hot*. Other notable topics rated as *not hot* included *English language learners*, *summer reading*, *teacher education*, and foundational skills such as *phonemic awareness/phonics*, and *fluency*. It is interesting to

note that *political/policy influences* was rated among the *not hot* topics, although policy seems to be influencing teacher perceptions of what is *hot*, as illustrated by the ranking of the CCSS as the hottest topic. See Table 2 for a complete breakdown of the top ten *not hot* topics, including percentages.

Table 2

Topic	% who rated this topic as <i>NOT HOT</i>
1- Writing: creative	81.30%
2- Genre knowledge and instruction	80.00%
3- Phonics/phonemic awareness	78.86%
4- Teacher education for reading (embedded)	73.98%
5- Fluency	71.43%
6- Summer reading	69.05%
7- Preschool literacy instruction/experiences (Pre-K)	66.95%
8- Literacy coaches/reading coaches/reading specialists	66.41%
9- English language learners/English as a second language	64.57%
10- Political/policy influences on literacy	63.03%

### Should Be Hot

Among the topics readers felt *should be hot*, 94% of responders selected *adolescent literacy*, placing it at the top of the list. Second was *early intervention*, selected by 93% of responding readers. Again, this trend is not surprising because it supports our previous finding that the *What's Hot* survey results closely parallel recent policy efforts. In other

words, it makes sense in the current educational climate that educators in Michigan are concerned with preparing students early on and up through adolescence to meet the CCSS, and ultimately the high-stakes assessments that test these standards. The top ten topics that respondents felt *should be hot* can be viewed in Table 3.

Table 3

Topic	% who rated this topic as <i>SHOULD BE HOT</i>
1- Adolescent Literacy	94.44%
2- Early intervention (K-3)	92.52%
3- Critical Reading and writing	91.51%
4- Comprehension	90.00%
5- Informational/nonfiction texts	88.46%
6- Motivation/engagement	84.40%
7- Struggling readers (grade 4 and above)	88.39%
8- Disciplinary/content area literacy	86.92%
9- Close reading/deep reading	84.91%
10- Writing: argumentative, and based on sources	84.76%

### Should Not Be Hot

We have chosen to report only the topics that more than 50% of respondents said *should not be hot*, rather than sharing the top ten. Only two of our survey topics fit that criteria. The first was

*high-stakes assessment*, which 73.8% of respondents thought *should not be hot*, even though 81.2% said that it is currently a *hot* topic. The second was *genre knowledge and instruction*, which 57.9% of respondents thought *should not be hot*.

Table 4

Topic	% who rated this topic as <i>SHOULD NOT BE HOT</i>
1- High-stakes assessment	73.83%
2- Genre knowledge and instruction	57.94%
3- Political/policy influences on literacy	47.57%
4- Fluency	46.73%
5- Phonics/phonemic awareness	45.00%
6- Writing: creative	41.90%
7- STEM literacy	33.65%
8- English language learners/English as a second language	30.19%
9- Summer reading	28.30%
10- Literacy coaches/reading coaches/reading specialists	28.18%

## Responding to This Survey

### What We Have Done so Far

In the first year of the journal we published several articles addressing the topics readers rated as *hot* and *should be hot*. We have published a number of articles addressing the CCSS including *Building Capacity for Sustained Change: Characteristics of Common Core Implementation Models that Actually Work*, by KaiLonnie Dunsmore and Catherine Nelson, and *Engaging with the Common Core*, by Kristyn Stierley (2014, *Volume 47(1)*). In the same issue Fries, Howard, and Johnson addressed the implementation of a school-wide reading intervention program in their article titled *Implementation of a Reading Intervention Program: Internal Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis* (2014, *Volume 47(1)*). These articles addressed some of the hottest topics from the survey, although they were published before we had received our survey results. Since receiving and reviewing survey responses, we have intentionally sought to publish articles on topics of concern to our readers. In our second issue, for example, we published *Critical Issues* articles on the new M-STEP assessments by Suzanne Hindman and Wendy Zdeb-Roper (2015, *Volume 47(2)*). Julie Johnsen highlighted strategies for working with informational text (2015, *Volume 47(3)*) in our third issue, and Mary Smith addressed adolescent literacy and college and career readiness. In our current issue, Kathy Highfield and Laura Pardo review two professional books related to close, critical reading and complex texts. Additionally, Nell Duke tackles project-based learning with a focus on incorporating informational texts.

### What Can You Do? Write for MRJ!

While we have received and published a plethora of articles addressing topics that readers rated as *hot* or *should be hot*, we have not yet discussed some of these topics in the pages of the journal. For example, many of the manuscripts we have received over the past year have addressed topics such as engagement, read-alouds, and writing

workshop, but we have not received many submissions addressing the *hot* topics of reading comprehension, argumentative writing, and preschool/early intervention. In response, we are specifically requesting manuscripts addressing these topics. We also note that many topics that were not rated as *hot* on the survey are still relevant to educators statewide, and we hope to continue receiving and publishing articles on a wide range of topics for our diverse audience.

## Conclusion

We are delighted at the opportunity to serve as the editorial team for the *Michigan Reading Journal* and to represent the journal here at Michigan State University. Furthermore, it is a privilege to communicate with all of you about the future of the journal. We do hope that you will watch your email so that you can participate in the next *What's Hot* survey coming in January 2016. In the meantime, we wish you a joyful and productive year. Please consider sharing *MRJ* and your enthusiasm for the journal with colleagues so that our readership continues to grow! We look forward to seeing you at the annual Michigan Reading Association conference in Detroit on March 18-21, 2016.



# Michigan Reading Association



## Membership Information

Regular Membership - \$35

Retired Membership - \$20

Full-time Undergraduate  
Student Membership - \$15

*As part of your membership,  
receive discounts to both  
MRA conferences.*

To sign up, go to  
[www.michiganreading.org](http://www.michiganreading.org)

The Michigan Reading Association (MRA) is an organization of people who believe that literacy is the key to transforming people's lives. Chartered in 1956 by the International Reading Association, MRA has grown to be a leader in providing literacy resources to teachers, parents, and universities.

The mission of MRA is to promote literacy across the state of Michigan. Our association works toward this goal in several ways:

- We offer high quality professional development conferences for teachers, adult educators, administrators, and all those involved in literacy education. We also invite homeschoolers and parents to access the best in literacy professional development.
- MRA's Michigan Reading Journal is one of the top research journals in the country and is available in both print and electronic formats.
- MRA works with local reading councils around the state to provide support and professional development to members in every region of the state.
- The organization supports international literacy efforts, such as TEACH: Teachers Educating and Creating Hope. This group is comprised of many Chaldean and some non-Chaldean teachers in the Detroit area interested in helping those displaced families with necessities and schooling needs.
- MRA puts on two conferences a year. Our Annual Conference in March brings in 1600 conferees, 150 speakers, and 100 exhibitors from across the state and country. With over 30 breakout sessions every session slot, there is always something for everyone. Our Summer Literature Conference in July offers a chance to interact with authors and illustrators more closely in a beautiful summer venue.

As a Michigan non-profit 501(c)3, we are governed by a board of volunteers who work tirelessly to promote the cause of literacy throughout the state of Michigan.