

Background Knowledge and Vocabulary

March 19, 2026

Session 6

Meet the Presenters



**Johnna
Terwelp**

Regional Office of
Education #1



Kristen Driscoll

University of Illinois
Urbana-Champaign



Dara Carr

Regional Office of
Education #28



Housekeeping Items

- All Resources for the Session can be found here: [2025-2026 Literacy Capacity Builder Resources](#)
- All resources are available in our shared folder: [Literacy Capacity Builder Participant Resources \(2025-2026\)](#)
- Resources are archived on ISBE's [Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan webpage](#) after each session.



Illinois has an **urgent** and **collective responsibility** to achieve **educational equity** by ensuring that **all** policies, programs, and practices **affirm** the **strengths** that each and **every child** brings within their **diverse backgrounds** and **life experiences**, and by delivering the comprehensive **supports, programs, and educational opportunities** they need to **succeed**.

ISBE Equity Statement



Shared Norms

Empower

Stay future-focused, work toward solutions, and promote progress in every discussion.

Engage

Actively participate by sharing feedback and interacting in both the chat and small groups.

Uplift

Encourage diverse perspectives, provide space for everyone to share their ideas, and embrace discomfort to foster growth.

Unite

Foster a sense of togetherness and openness, ensuring full participation. Make your video available if possible.

Agenda

1

Guiding
Values

2

Background
Knowledge

3

Vocabulary
Connection

Every learner
is capable and has
the right to equitable
access to high-
quality, inclusive,
differentiated, and
evidence-based
literacy instruction.

Every learner
deserves schools that
nurture their unique
assets and interests,
honoring their
complexity within
the context of their
communities.

Every learner
has the right to
develop literacy in two
or more languages to
prepare for success in
our global world.

Every learner
has the right to reliable
and valid assessments
that accurately
measure their literacy
skills.

Every learner
has the right to be
empowered through
agency to self-
advocate within
supportive learning
environments.

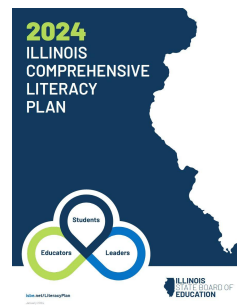
CALL TO ACTION
Illinois' Education
systems must prioritize
literacy as a fundamental
goal, recognizing it is
essential in all aspects of
students' lives.

<p>Every learner is capable and has the right to equitable access to high-quality, inclusive, differentiated, and evidence-based literacy instruction.</p>	<p>Every learner deserves schools that nurture their unique assets and interests, honoring their complexity within the context of their communities.</p>
<p>EQUITABLE LITERACY EDUCATION</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowers and equips students with skills to make meaning, cultivating individual and collective agency toward continued growth and lifelong learning; • Prioritizes explicit, systematic, and structured instruction of foundational reading skills; • Utilizes high-quality, evidence-based literacy practices; • Considers data from valid, reliable sources as a tool to improve instruction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honors and leverages family and community language and culture; • Encourages partnerships between educators, families, students, and community; • Implements Universal Design for Learning principles; • Provides early, regular, and reliable opportunities for students to showcase literacy skills; • Reflects the linguistic resources of each student.

Illinois' Guiding Values for Literacy

Illinois **values and affirms all learners** across its diverse communities. ISBE believes that it is important to ***recognize and build on every student's strengths, supporting them through challenges to guide and shape their literacy development.*** Illinois' Guiding Values for Literacy illustrates the core tenants at the heart of this work.

(ICPL, 2024, p. 12-13)



<p>Every learner has the right to develop literacy in two or more languages to prepare for success in our global world.</p>	<p>Every learner has the right to be empowered through agency to self-advocate within supportive learning environments.</p>	<p>Every learner has the right to reliable and valid assessments that accurately measure their literacy skills.</p>
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EQUITABLE LITERACY EDUCATION

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverages students' language practices and ways of showing what they know; • Contextualizes literacy and language learning in explicit, authentic, and meaningful ways; • Adapts to students' sociocultural experiences and language needs; • Offers culturally and linguistically responsive scaffolding that supports early identification measures. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fosters the joy of reading, encourages student choice, and cultivates independent reading habits; • Optimizes the relationship between receptive and expressive modes of communication; • Develops critical literacy skills to mastery, enabling all learners to thoroughly examine, analyze, and evaluate texts for power, equity, and social justice; • Recognizes every student's linguistic knowledge; • Engages multiple modalities for students to demonstrate knowledge. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports educators with resources, professional learning, student-centered support systems for high-quality, evidence-based literacy practices; • Identifies and adjusts to evolving learning needs; • Incorporates ongoing, evidence-based support for students who struggle with literacy; • Employs comprehensive, adaptable support across all learning areas and levels, incorporating various educational strategies and tools. |
|---|---|--|

Illinois' Guiding Values for Literacy

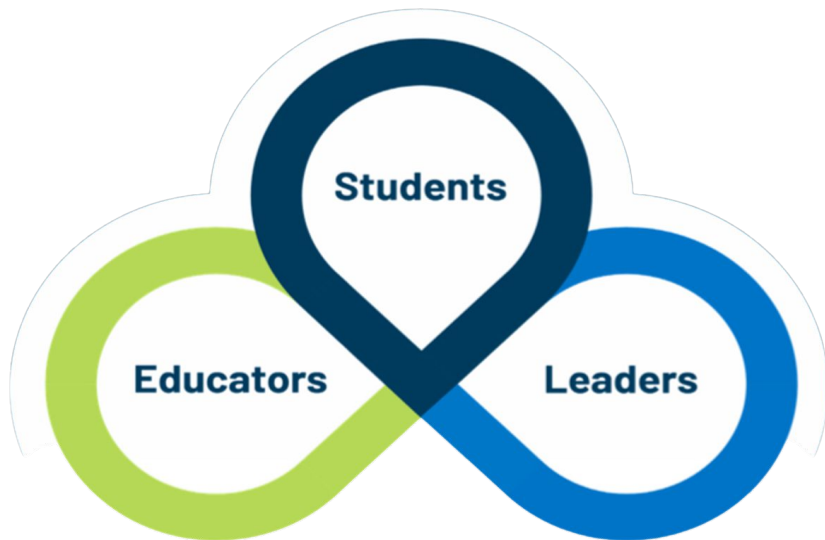
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(ICPL, 2024, p. 12-13)



Values and Discussion

Take a moment to review the descriptors for each of the goal statements. They can be found [here](#).



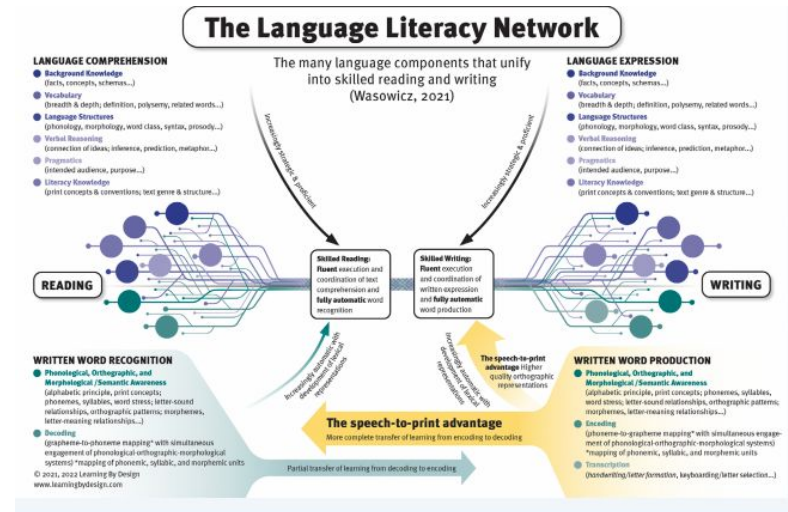
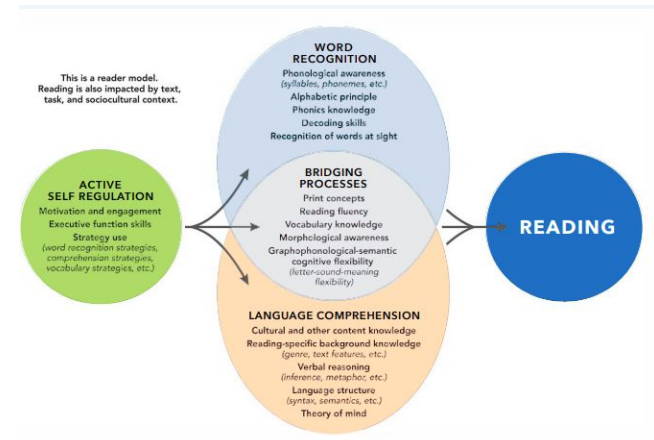
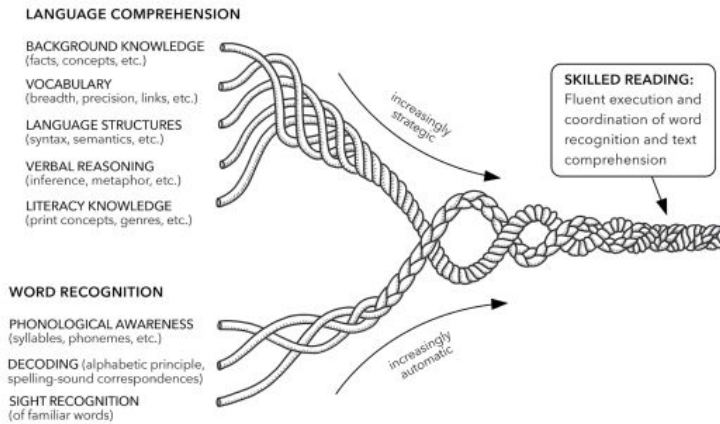
Breakout Rooms:

- How are these values enacted in your school and/or classroom?
- What areas are in need of improvement? What support would you need to grow these areas?
- What can these values remind us about children and the knowledge they bring to our schools and classrooms?

Background Knowledge

Background Knowledge

The Importance



Background Knowledge

The Importance

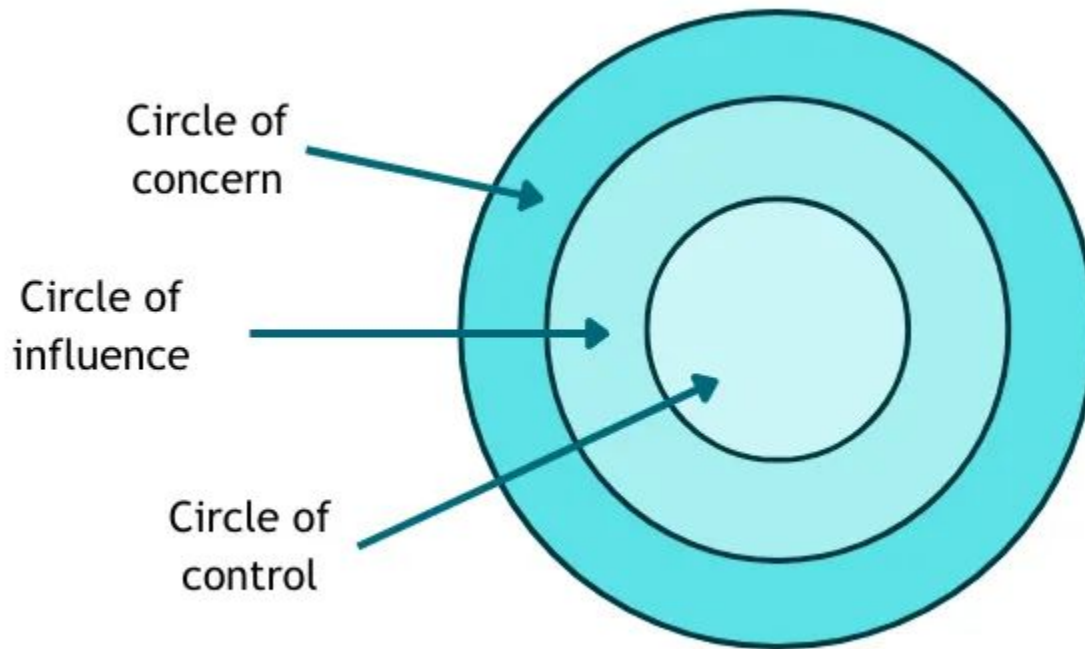
“The ability to think critically - like the ability to understand what you read - can’t be taught directly and in the abstract. It’s inextricably linked to how much knowledge you have about the situation at hand.”

Natalie Wexler -
*The Knowledge
Gap*



Background Knowledge

The Importance



teachit

Background Knowledge

How DO We Build It in the Classroom?

- Intentionally Planning
- Interactive Read Alouds
- Teaching with Text Sets
 - Different genres, viewpoints, and authors
 - Expanded exposure = expanded knowledge
- Hands-On Activities
- Word Maps
- Jigsaw Strategy
- Children as Experts
- Multimedia
 - Virtual field trips
 - Museum tours
 - Live cams

Background Knowledge

How DO We Build It in the Classroom?



Breakout Discussion #2

Think about the knowledge building practices:

Intentionally Planning
Interactive Read Alouds
Teaching with Text Sets
Hands-On Activities
Word Maps
Jigsaw Strategy
Children as Experts
Multimedia

Discuss:

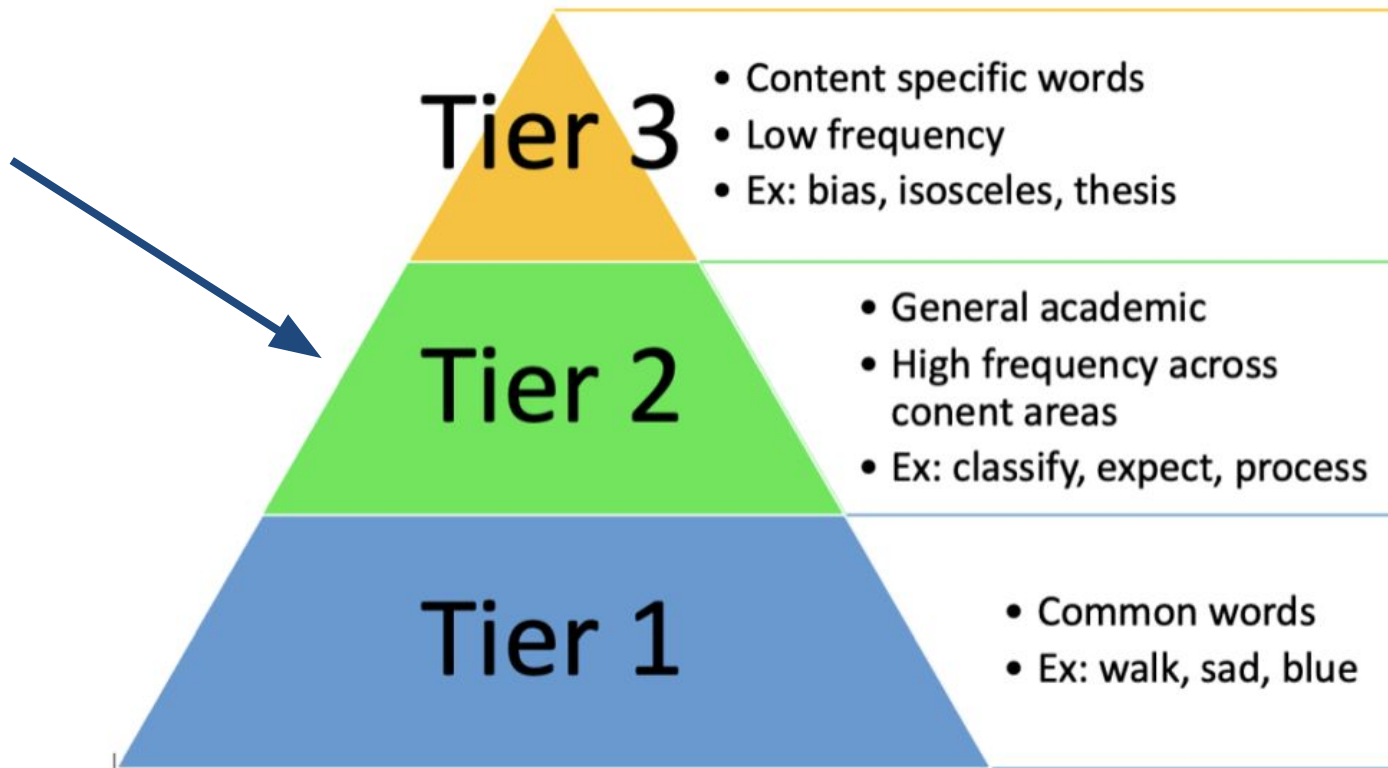
Which one are you most comfortable with and what does that look like in your classroom?

Which one would you like to explore more?



Academic Success

“Given the importance of academic background knowledge and the fact that vocabulary is such an essential aspect of it, one of the most crucial services that teachers can provide, is systematic instruction in important academic terms.” (Marzano and Pickering 2005).



Three-Tiered Model of Vocabulary (Beck et al., 2013)

**Shout-Out Tier 2:
Academic Words
in the Chat**

Academic Word Lists

My favorite:

The Essential 25!

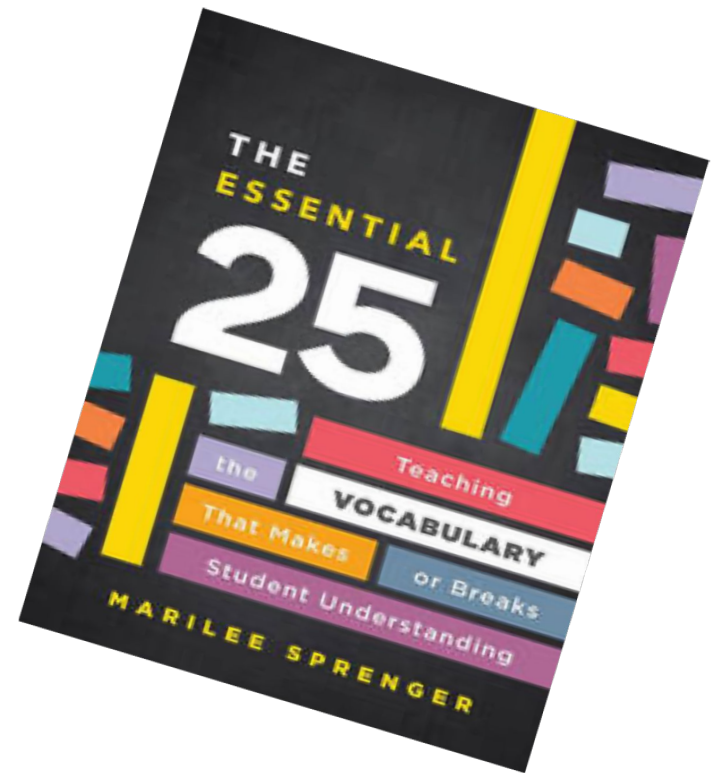
compare
contrast
demonstrate
describe
details
determine
distinguish
explain
point of view
support
trace

develop
evidence
infer
interpret
main idea
structure
summarize
paraphrase
theme

analyze
cite
evaluate
persuade
relevant

Marilee Sprenger has curated this list of the critical words students must know to be successful with the State Standards and any other standardized assessment they encounter.

*It is Recommended to teach lists and words in order!



Marzano's 6 Step Process for Teaching New Terms

Step 1: Teacher provides a description, explanation or example.

Step 2: Students restates the description, explanation or example.

Step 3: Students draw a picture, symbol or graphic representation.

Step 4: Students add to their knowledge of the terms.

Step 5: Students discuss terms with one another.

Step 6: Students play games that allow them to practice new terms.

Adapted from Building Academic Vocabulary by Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering, 2005

Frayer Model Template

<p>Definition:</p>	<p>Use the word in a meaningful sentence:</p>
<p>Part of Speech: (noun, verb, adjective, or adverb)</p>	<p>Word:</p>
<p>Draw a picture to illustrate the word:</p>	<p>Synonym:</p> <p>Antonym:</p>

Breakout Discussion #3

Share how you focus on teaching Tier 2 Vocabulary:

-Do you have a list that you explicitly teach? Explain

Marzano's 6-Step Process:

- What are the benefits to this strategy?

Fruyer Model

- What are the benefits to this strategy?

Moving Towards Discipline Literacy

- Academic tier 2 vocabulary are high-frequency words across ALL discipline areas.
- A strong foundation in academic vocabulary helps students to read, write, and communicate like scientists, historians, mathematicians and other discipline professionals.



Mark Your Calendars: 2025 - 2026 Capacity Builders

- 10/30/25 Session 1: Overview of the Series and Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan
- 11/13/25 Session 2: Evidence-Based Instructional Practices
- 12/18/25 Session 3: Writing Instruction
- 1/22/26 Session 4: Writing Instruction
- 2/19/26 Session 5: Vocabulary Instruction
- 3/19/26 Session 6: Background Knowledge and Vocabulary
- 4/16/26 Session 7: Adolescent and Disciplinary Literacy
- 5/21/25 Session 8: Assessment and Instructional Decision Making



Evaluation for Session 6

Please complete the evaluation form for this session:

[Evaluation | Session 6](#)

[Evidence of completion form](#)

**Evaluation | Session 6:
Background Knowledge and
Vocabulary**





2026 Illinois Literacy Institute

Elementary Teams: Day One: June 15th

Topics:

- Local Literacy Plan Construction and/or Revision
- Evidence-Based, Responsive Literacy Teaching
- Data-Driven Literacy Decision Making and Assessment Monitoring
- Scheduling for Literacy Instruction
- Curriculum and Alignment (e.g., Evaluating Curricular Resources)
- Developing and Monitoring a Professional Learning Plan
- Intervention Support
- Family and Community Engagement
- Intentional Integration of Multilingual Practices

Elementary Teams: Day Two: June 16th

Topics:

- Components of Literacy Instruction
- Evidence-Based, Responsive Literacy Practices
- Purposeful Integration of Reading, Writing, and Speaking Practices
- Reviewing, Selecting, and/or Developing a Scope and Sequence for Early Reading Instruction
- Specific Considerations for Writing Instruction
- Reviewing and Evaluating Literacy Curricular Materials
- Text Complexity
- Resource Integration
- Intentional Integration of Multilingual Practices

2026 Illinois Literacy Institute



Middle & Secondary Teams: Day One: June 17th

Topics:

- Local Literacy Plan Construction and/or Revision
- Evidence-Based, Responsive Literacy Teaching
- Data-Driven Literacy Decision Making and Assessment Monitoring
- Scheduling for Literacy Instruction
- Curriculum and Alignment (e.g., Evaluating Curricular Resources)
- Developing and Monitoring a Professional Learning Plan
- Intervention Support
- Family and Community Engagement
- Intentional Integration of Multilingual Practices

Middle & Secondary Teams: Day Two: June 18th

Topics:

- **Disciplinary Literacy** (e.g., Literacy Development Processes; Doing the Discipline, Inquiry within the Discipline; Reading, Writing, and Thinking within the Discipline; Disciplinary Talk; Critical Literacies; Text Complexity; Routines and Practices; Specialized Vocabulary; Discipline-Specific Text Structures; Evaluating Evidence; Communicating through Domain-Specific Genres; Digital Literacies; Intentional Integration of Multilingual Practices)
- **Writing Instruction** (e.g., Knowing Writers and Writing; Writing Engagement; Writing Process; Writing Craft; Writing Purpose, Genre, and Structure; Writing about Reading; Multimodality; Writing Instruction Through and With Mentor Texts, Authors; Writing With and Against (Critical Writing); Writing Assessment; Writing, Technologies, and AI; Intentional Integration of Multilingual Practices)

Capacity Builders: ICLP Lead Team

Dara Carr

Professional Development/School Improvement | BHS ROE #28

Johnna Terwelp

Professional Learning Coordinator | Regional Office of Education #1

Molly Allen

Assistant Regional Superintendent | Regional Office of Education #17

Chrissy Wiggs

Professional Development Director | Regional Office of Education #21

Saranja Hicks

ELA Curriculum & Instruction Specialist | South Cook ISC

Kim Johnson

ELA Principal Consultant | Illinois State Board of Education

Kellyn Sirach

Reading Content Specialist | IL SLD Support Project

Scott Filkins

Lecturer & K-12 Licensure Programs Coordinator | UIUC

Kristen Driscoll

Assistant Professor, Curriculum & Instruction | UIUC

Deborah MacPhee

Professor, Elementary Literacy | Illinois State University

Michael Young

Assistant Professor, Elementary Literacy | Illinois State University

Jess Rodriguez

Early Writing Content Specialist | IL SLD Support Project



Questions



Thank you