

UNH and Raymond Schools Partner in Literacy Effort

By [Erika Mantz](#)

603-862-1567

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DURHAM, N.H. -- With the help of two University of New Hampshire education professors and a state grant, the Raymond school district has made a commitment to improving literacy in grades K-12.

"Traditionally, the emphasis on literacy has been the focus of the elementary school curriculum," says John Carney, professor of education at UNH. "In middle and secondary school, we move from learning to read to reading to learn. The emphasis in middle and secondary schools needs to be teaching students content, as well as how to read and write about the content that they are learning. Recognizing that it is difficult to ask teachers to take on an additional role, this district is committed to providing its teachers with the skills they need to address literacy as well as emphasize content."

In the spring of 2000, the school district received a grant from the Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education to look at the status of its middle and high school literacy. Carney surveyed teachers, visited classrooms and reported to the school board that summer. From there, it evolved into a year-long focus on literacy for the entire district. Carney brought in his colleague Ruth Wharton-MacDonald and last fall they started in-service training for teachers.

Carney and Wharton-MacDonald teach Division of Continuing Education courses in the schools for the teachers, spreading the classes throughout the year so teachers can practice what they're learning. Wharton-MacDonald works with teachers in readiness through grade 4 and Carney, who has been at UNH for 29 years and specializes in secondary and content-area reading, provides the in-service training for those teaching in grades five through 12.

"This is a wonderful program because it brings the university into the schools," says Jim Turbeville, superintendent of the Raymond School District. "It's a great resource because, historically, the first monies cut out of a budget are staff development monies. Because we were focusing on reading instruction, this was the most economical way for us to provide our teachers with the staff development they need. Partnerships like these benefit everyone."

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