The Literacy Leader Reset

A January Reset Guide for Principals, Assistant Principals, Coaches, and District Leaders

This Winter Reset Toolkit is designed for teachers, coaches, and school leaders who are using the holiday break to reflect, recharge, and prepare for a strong start to the new semester. Each resource is intentionally practical, easy to use, and grounded in real instructional and leadership needs.

January is not the time to launch more initiatives, pile on expectations, or push harder out of urgency. It is the time to reset leadership focus, protect teacher capacity, and strengthen literacy systems that already exist.

The Literacy Leader Reset is designed to help school and district leaders pause, reflect, and lead the second half of the year with clarity, alignment, and purpose—without overwhelming teachers or diluting instructional priorities.

Why a Leadership Reset Matters

Across the nation, literacy leaders are navigating increased accountability, staffing shortages, and persistent achievement gaps. At the same time, teachers are experiencing fatigue, initiative overload, and uncertainty around expectations.

Effective leadership at this point in the year is not about doing more. It is about doing what matters most—and letting go of what does not.

Part I: What to STOP Doing in January

Strong literacy leadership requires discernment. Not every initiative, meeting, or request deserves continued attention.

In January, leaders should intentionally pause the following:

☐ Rolling out new literacy initiatives without clear alignment to existing goals

☐ Adding expectations without removing others

☐ Holding meetings that lack a clear instructional purpose

☐ Using compliance-driven walkthroughs instead of learning-focused observations

☐ Responding to every issue as an emergency rather than prioritizing impact

Reflection:
What is one leadership practice or expectation I can pause to protect instructional focus?

Part II: What to PROTECT

High-performing schools protect a small set of non-negotiables. These protections create stability, trust, and consistency for teachers and students.

☐ Teacher planning and collaboration time

☐ Clear and consistent literacy expectations

☐ Instructional routines that are already working

☐ Teacher energy and morale

☐ Coaching conversations focused on growth, not evaluation

Leadership Insight:
Protecting teacher time and energy is not lowering expectations—it is how leaders sustain excellence.

National Literacy Institute

Part III: What to RESET

A reset is not a restart. It is a realignment.

January is the ideal time to clarify expectations, refocus coaching, and strengthen literacy systems.

☐ Instructional priorities aligned to Science of Reading principles

☐ Coaching structures that emphasize support and clarity

☐ Intervention systems that are purposeful and targeted

☐ Communication practices that value clarity over volume

☐ Leadership presence in classrooms as learners, not inspectors

Reflection:
What does my staff need clarity on—not more communication about?

Part IV: 30-Day Literacy Leadership Focus Map

Week 1: Observe and Listen

Focus on classroom observations with a learning lens. Listen to teacher feedback, identify strengths, and note areas of alignment.

Week 2: Clarify and Communicate

Narrow instructional focus. Communicate clear literacy expectations and align leadership messaging across the campus or district.

Week 3: Support and Coach

Provide targeted coaching support. Model effective practices and remove barriers identified by teachers.

Week 4: Reflect and Adjust

Review progress, celebrate wins, and adjust supports while maintaining high expectations.

Part V: Leadership Commitments

Use this space to commit to focused leadership actions for the next 30 days.

☐ One leadership habit I will stop:

☐ One priority I will protect:

☐ One literacy focus I will strengthen:

☐ One way I will support teacher sustainability:

A Final Word to Literacy Leaders

You do not need to lead with urgency to be effective.

You need clarity, consistency, and the courage to protect what matters most.

When literacy leaders reset intentionally, schools move forward with purpose—not pressure.

Five Questions Every Literacy Leader Should Ask in January

• What literacy practices are working that we need to protect?

• What expectations are unclear or inconsistent for teachers?

• Where are teachers feeling overwhelmed—and why?

• How are we using coaching time to support instruction rather than monitor compliance?

• What one leadership move would most improve literacy outcomes this month?

Small-Group Literacy Instruction Look-Fors

These look-fors support coaching conversations and instructional reflection without creating pressure or compliance.

☐ Clear instructional purpose for each group

☐ Aligned skill focus based on student data

☐ Explicit modeling and guided practice

☐ Opportunities for student talk and response

☐ Efficient routines that maximize instructional time

Science of Reading: Myths vs. Reality (Quick Guide)

Myth: Science of Reading is a program.

→ Reality: It is a body of research that informs instruction.

Myth: SOR only applies to early grades.

→ Reality: SOR principles support literacy across grade levels.

Myth: SOR eliminates comprehension and writing.

→ Reality: SOR strengthens all components of literacy.

Myth: Teachers must abandon everything they do.

→ Reality: Effective practices are refined, not discarded.

AI-Free Literacy Toolkit

High-Impact Instructional Moves That Don't Require Technology

This AI-Free Literacy Toolkit is designed for educators who want strong, research-aligned literacy instruction without learning new platforms, managing devices, or adding screen time. These strategies work in any classroom, at any grade level, and are especially effective during high-stress periods like January.

Why AI-Free Still Matters

While technology can support instruction, effective literacy teaching has always relied on clear routines, intentional teacher moves, and meaningful student interaction. These strategies reduce cognitive overload for teachers and students while increasing engagement and instructional clarity.

1. Choral Reading (Fluency + Confidence)

Choral reading allows students to read aloud together, reducing anxiety while building fluency and accuracy.
How to Use:
• Teacher models the text first
• Students read together at a controlled pace
• Repeat for accuracy and expression

Why It Works: Builds automaticity and confidence without putting individual students on the spot.

2. Repeated Reading (Fluency Growth)

Students read the same passage multiple times with a clear purpose.
How to Use:
• First read: accuracy
• Second read: rate
• Third read: expression

Why It Works: Research-based approach to improving fluency and comprehension.

3. Vocabulary Notebooks (Word Consciousness)

Students maintain personal vocabulary notebooks to deepen word knowledge.
How to Use:
• Introduce 2–3 high-utility words per week
• Include student-friendly definitions, visuals, and usage

Why It Works: Builds ownership of vocabulary and supports comprehension across content areas.

4. Sound Walls & Morphology Walls

Visual word study tools that support decoding, spelling, and meaning.
How to Use:
• Organize sounds (not letters) for phonics
• Add prefixes, roots, and suffixes over time

Why It Works: Makes the structure of language visible and accessible.

5. Think-Alouds (Comprehension Modeling)

Teachers verbalize their thinking while reading to model comprehension strategies.
How to Use:
• Pause and explain predictions, questions, or clarifications
• Keep modeling brief and intentional

Why It Works: Makes invisible thinking visible to students.

6. Sentence Frames (Language + Writing Support)

Sentence frames support student responses without lowering rigor.
Examples:
• One thing I learned from the text is ____.
• The author's message is ____ because ____.

Why It Works: Supports ELs, struggling writers, and all learners.

7. Turn-and-Talk with Purpose

Structured peer discussion aligned to a clear prompt.
How to Use:
• Provide a sentence stem
• Set a time limit
• Circulate and listen for understanding

Why It Works: Increases engagement and oral language development.

8. Exit Tickets Aligned to Objectives

Short, focused checks for understanding.
How to Use:
• One question aligned to the daily objective
• Use responses to guide next-day instruction

Why It Works: Gives immediate feedback without extra grading.

9. Anchor Charts That Students Actually Use

Co-created charts that support independence.
How to Use:

• Create with students, not for them
• Refer to them consistently during instruction

Why It Works: Reinforces strategies and routines visually.

10. Read-Alouds at Every Grade Level
Teacher-led reading of complex texts.
How to Use:
• Choose texts above students' independent reading level
• Model vocabulary, syntax, and comprehension

Why It Works: Builds background knowledge and language development.

These AI-free instructional moves reduce burnout by simplifying planning while maintaining high-quality literacy instruction.

Created by the National Literacy Institute
Supporting educators with practical, research-aligned professional learning.