The Urgent need to improve reading instruction and outcomes for our K-12 students

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“Current difficulties in reading largely originate from rising demands for literacy, not from declining absolute levels of literacy”
Rising needs for high levels of literacy in our society demand that schools break the mold of past performance--we clearly must do better than has ever been done before.
Even students who complete high school successfully at present are not prepared for many post secondary options.

Comparing the difficulty of typical 11th and 12th grade texts with those encountered in college and other post secondary environments.

Estimates based on average Lexiles of text.
When all of this data is brought together, it is apparent that society in general and the workplace in particular demand higher levels of reading proficiency than schools. Moreover, many students are barely meeting those minimal education requirements.

(p. 3) -- Pennsylvania Department of Education (2004)
This study calculates the financial costs incurred by Michigan business and institutions of higher learning when students leave high school without learning basic skills. … The best estimate … is $601 million per year. Extrapolating to the entire United States, the lack of basic skills costs a total of approximately $16.6 billion each year.

--Greene (2000)
In fall 2000, 28 percent of entering freshmen enrolled in one or more remedial reading, writing, or mathematics courses. (p. iv)

Why do such high numbers of students struggle in learning to read?

Many students come to school poorly prepared for learning to read because of reduced learning opportunities in their pre-school environment.
Development of Phonological Sensitivity

Cross-sectional study comparing the performance of 250 children from higher income families to 170 children from lower income families.

Children were between two- and five-years of age.
Language

Meaningful Differences
in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children

Betty Hart & Todd R. Risley
Foreword by Lois Bloom
Hart and Risley (1995) conducted a longitudinal study of children and families from three groups:

- Professional families
- Working-class families
- Families on welfare
Hart & Risley compared the mean number of interactions initiated per hour in each of the three groups.
Interactions

Hart & Risley also compared the mean number of minutes of interaction per hour in the three groups.
Cumulative Language Experiences

Cumulative Words Spoken to Child
(in millions)

Age of child (in months)

- Professional
- Working
- Welfare
Why do such high numbers of students struggle in learning to read

Many students come to school poorly prepared for learning to read because of reduced learning opportunities in their pre-school environment.

Other students have biologically based, specific language disabilities that interfere with reading.
Alexis....
Why do such high numbers of students struggle in learning to read

Many students come to school poorly prepared for learning to read because of reduced learning opportunities in their pre-school environment.

Other students have biologically based, specific language disabilities that interfere with reading.

Until relatively recently, we have not understood reading skill well enough to develop consensus about the best methods for teaching struggling readers.
The challenge of diversity in talent and preparation for learning to read

Diversity in talent and preparation

Diversity of educational response

1 100

30 70
The challenge of diversity in talent and preparation for learning to read

Diversity in talent and preparation

Diversity of educational response
What we must do to prevent reading failure in grades K-3: The big Ideas

1. Increase the quality, consistency, and reach of instruction in every K-3 classroom

2. Conduct timely and valid assessments of reading growth to identify struggling readers

3. Provide more intensive interventions to “catch up” the struggling readers

The prevention of reading difficulties is a school-level challenge
Evidence from one school that we can do substantially better than ever before.

School Characteristics:
- 70% Free and Reduced Lunch (going up each year)
- 65% minority (mostly African-American)

Elements of Curriculum Change:
- Movement to a more balanced reading curriculum beginning in 1994-1995 school year (incomplete implementation) for K-2
- Improved implementation in 1995-1996
- Implementation in Fall of 1996 of screening and more intensive small group instruction for at-risk students
“soft bigotry of low expectations”
Hartsfield Elementary Progress over five years

Proportion falling below the 25th percentile in word reading ability at the end of first grade

Average Percentile for entire grade (n=105)

1995: 31.8
1996: 20.4
1997: 10.9
1998: 6.7
1999: 3.7

Average Percentile:
1995: 48.9
1996: 55.2
1997: 61.4
1998: 73.5
1999: 81.7

Screening at beginning of first grade, with extra instruction for those in bottom 30-40%
Proportion falling below the 25th Percentile

1995: 31.8
1996: 20.4
1997: 10.9
1998: 6.7
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Average Percentile
1995: 48.9
1996: 55.2
1997: 61.4
1998: 73.5
1999: 81.7

Hartsfield Elementary Progress over five years

Average Percentile
1996: 58.2
1997: 67.1
1998: 74.1
1999: 81.5
How must we improve reading instruction for students in grades 4-12?

1. Must have very intensive intervention instruction for students who have fallen far behind
Consequences of reading difficulties: an ever widening gap

The gap increases in both depth and breadth
Teaching Reading is Urgent

A student at the 10\textsuperscript{th} percentile reads about 60,000 words a year in 5\textsuperscript{th} grade.

A student at the 50\textsuperscript{th} percentile reads about 900,000 words a year in 5\textsuperscript{th} grade.

Average students receive about 15 times as much practice in a year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentile Rank</th>
<th>Minutes Per Day</th>
<th>Words Read Per Year</th>
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<td>Text</td>
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</table>

(Anderson, R. C., 1992)
Each year skills and knowledge required to meet standards increases

- Must learn to recognize many new words accurately and automatically
- Must acquire many new vocabulary words
- Must learn to deal with longer sentences and more complex ideas
- Must be able to draw upon more extensive background knowledge
How must we improve reading instruction for students in grades 4-12?

1. Must have very intensive intervention instruction for students who have fallen far behind

2. Must be more effective in teaching all students to think more productively about what they read

3. Must be more effective in teaching content in areas like science, social studies, and history so that students will acquire more knowledge

4. Develop a culture of success in which students want to participate in achieving high standards
Quality in Education

“Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction, and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives.”

Willa A. Foster

If we have an impact on literacy instruction, we improve the quality of our schools in the most central way possible.
A reason for working hard at the task....
Thank You