

## Commissioner's Secondary Reading Advisory Panel Recommendations for Consideration

**Overview:** In January and March of 2005, a group of national reading experts met at the Commissioner's invitation, and sponsored by the Florida Education Foundation, to craft a plan for serving the needs of Florida's middle and secondary struggling readers. Their recommendations, along with current efforts to date, are as follows:

### I. PREVENTION EFFORTS

**Challenge:** Far too many students are performing at Level 1 and 2 on the FCAT in third grade, and many of these students will certainly be Level 1 and 2 readers in middle school. Florida must *expand and intensify* its prevention efforts while at the same time mount an initiative to assist struggling readers in middle school. Ultimately, the most cost effective and humane solution to the problem of struggling readers in middle school will be to prevent the emergence of reading difficulties in the first place.

**Recommendation:** Maintain a strong state focus on prevention of reading difficulties in K-3.

- Efforts to date
  - Access to the Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN), a data reporting system, provided for every district for grades K-3
  - Production of a video on the 90 minute instructional block for every district
  - Reading diagnostic assessments provided for lowest quartile in K-3 in every district since 2000
  - Reading coaches provided for and trained through Reading First and Reading Coaches Grant, as well as FEFP plans
  - 26,000 K-3 teachers trained in research-based instructional methods statewide as of August 2005, at Just Read, Florida! Reading Academies
  - Provision of research-based reading materials through the state instructional materials adoption process, as well as reviews of those materials through the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR).
  - Training for all elementary school principals since 2002, through Just Read, Florida! Leadership Conferences
  - Training for parents of struggling K-3 students since 2003, through Families Building Better Readers workshops
  - Intervention curricula and teams for Reading First schools, to be expanded to all elementary schools 2006-07
  - Launch of Literacy Essentials and Reading Network (LEaRN), an on line professional development resource with video clips of Florida teachers conducting research-based lessons.

**Recommendation:** Implement a very strong program of remediation and support available in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades.

- Efforts to date
  - Access to the PMRN provided for every district for grades 4-5
  - Reading diagnostic assessments provided for lowest quartile in K-3 in every district since 2004-05.
  - Reading coaches provided through Reading Coaches Grant, as well as FEFP plans
  - Training for all elementary school principals since 2002, through Just Read, Florida! Leadership Conferences
  - Training for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, beginning summer of 2005, through Just Read, Florida! Leadership Conferences

**Challenge:** Many of the poor and minority students who currently perform at Levels 1 and 2 on the FCAT entered schools with academic vocabularies already only half the size of their middle-class counterparts (Beck, McKeown, Kucan, 2002). Once children begin to learn to read, the continued expansion of their vocabularies occurs largely as a result of words they are exposed to while reading (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998). Since students who perform at Levels 1 and 2 in middle school are not likely to have read anywhere near as much text as average and above average students since the beginning of school, it is likely that the actual vocabulary gap in middle schools is relatively larger than when students entered school.

**Recommendation:** Increase the current ratio of narrative to expository text on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade Reading FCAT to 50:50, in an effort to increase instruction in content area concepts and vocabulary.

- Efforts to date
  - Initial conversations with the Assessment Office on necessary procedures

## **II. INTENSIVE READING INSTRUCTION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Challenge:** Sixth, seventh and eighth graders scoring Level 1 on FCAT Reading have almost certainly been very poor readers since the beginning of first grade. Their current reading fluency difficulties result from the fact that they struggled to become accurate and confident readers early on, did not develop independent reading habits, and have done very little reading compared to students with average or above average reading skills. Motivating non-readers requires offering a wide variety of reading choices, modeling reading, providing frequent opportunities for reading and text discussion, and being in touch with students' potential reading interests.

**Recommendation:** Provide intensive reading classes that are targeted to the knowledge and skill deficits of students at Levels 1 and 2.

- Efforts to date
  - K-12 Comprehensive Reading Plans for FEFP funding require that all struggling readers be served in a course that is intensive in instruction

- The Florida State Board of Education adopted in rule a revised, more rigorous course description for the intensive reading course to be offered to struggling readers in grades 6-12.
- Creation of a Reading Endorsement as a rider to the Florida certification process
- Provision of training for teachers seeking the endorsement. Training for all courses is currently offered free of charge.

**Recommendation:** Develop systematic state level training materials for teachers who will teach intensive classes.

- Efforts to date
  - The Reading Endorsement is a competency-based process. There are six competencies, and together, they offer a firm foundation and specialization in the prevention and remediation of reading difficulties, K-12.

**Recommendation:** Develop observational systems that supervisors, coaches and administrators can use to ensure fidelity of implementation of interventions and judicious use of the limited time available for instructional activities.

- Efforts to date
  - Creation of and training on a Principal Walkthrough for Reading, K-3 as part of DELTA
  - In development of a Principal Walkthrough for reading 4-12 as part of DELTA

**Recommendation:** Have a skillful coach in each middle and high school that supports instruction and decision making for student placement and progress within and across the intensive reading classes.

- Efforts to date
  - In 2004-05 about half of all middle schools had a state funded reading, but only 30 high schools had a state funded coach. The K-12 Comprehensive Reading Plan, as funded by the FEFP, will ensure that the number of coaches expands.
  - Through Just Read, Florida! Coaching Academies, all state, federal and locally funded reading coaches have received training.
  - Reading Coaches are also expected to pursue the Reading Endorsement
  - Expansion of the coaches' activities log on the PMRN to include capacity for all K-12 reading coaches

### **III. CONTENT AREA TEACHERS**

**Challenge:** For too long, content area teachers have had the sole responsibility for reading instruction in middle and secondary schools. As noted above, Florida has too many middle and secondary students reading below grade level. Content area teachers are not equipped, nor do they have the time to meet the Sunshine State Standards in their area of discipline and bring struggling readers up to grade level.

**Recommendation:** Content area teachers must be taught and encouraged to provide instruction and reinforcement in the same reading strategies as are taught in the intensive reading classes.

- Efforts to date
  - Content Area teachers are encouraged to pursue the Reading Endorsement.

**Recommendation:** Each middle and high school should have a **reading coach** who works with content area teachers to develop their skills in comprehension strategy instruction and teaching essential content.

- Efforts to date
  - The K-12 Comprehensive Reading Plan, as funded by the FEFP, will first ensure that reading teachers are served by reading coaches, followed by content area teachers receiving those coaches as well.
  - Expansion of the coaches' activities log on the PMRN to include capacity for all K-12 reading coaches

#### IV. ASSESSMENT

**Challenge:** FCAT is the first indicator for the upcoming school year that a student is a weak reader. It is imperative to identify Level 1 and level 2 students who struggle with basic word analysis skills (decoding) and reading fluency problems, so they could be properly placed in intensive reading classes.

**Recommendation:** Administer a quick screening instrument at the beginning of the year to identify Levels 1 and 2 students who struggle with basic word analysis skills and reading fluency problems, for proper placement in intensive reading classes. Also, administer a progress monitoring measure for all Levels 1 and 2 students in grades sixth through eighth, four times a year. The progress monitoring measure should assess both fluency and comprehension processes.

- Efforts to date
  - Expansion of PMRN to handle capacity of all students in grades 6-8
  - Development, by the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) of fluency probes to be offered, free of charge, to districts for students in grades 6-8

#### V. SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

**Challenge:** In many cases, specifically in middle and high schools, the academic day is not geared toward maximum learning. Too many external forces determine the amount of instructional time – schedules, allocation of resources, and athletics, just to name a few.

**Recommendation:** Maintain sufficient flexibility in class requirements and scheduling so that schools have the option to schedule large amounts of remedial instruction for students that are performing below grade level in reading.

- Efforts to date
  - The A++ legislation that failed to pass in the 2005 session would have allowed for this flexibility, while at the same time bringing more rigor to middle school coursework.
  - The K-12 Comprehensive Reading Plans, as funded through the FEFP, require that those students that are the most behind are served in longer periods of instructional units.

**Recommendation:** Provide training for district and school level staff in sources of funds and budgeting for intensive reading classes.

- Efforts to date
  - Since 2002, the Just Read, Florida! Leadership Conference has offered sessions on how to make student needs drive scheduling, how to review all the sources of funds coming into a school and how to use those funds to make reading a priority.