

**From:** Greenberg, Stuart  
**Sent time:** Tuesday, September 13, 2011 7:23:28 PM  
**To:** Mary Laura Bragg (MaryLaura@excelined.org) <MaryLaura@excelined.org>  
**Subject:** FW: Reading Instruction

In June I spoke at length with Senator Wise about what works and what does not work concerning reading instruction. This is the followup email I sent to him.

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**From:** Greenberg, Stuart  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 14, 2011 12:42 PM  
**To:** 'srwise@att.net'  
**Subject:** Reading Instruction

Good afternoon Senator Wise,  
It was great chatting with you about the need to ensure that all students become highly proficient readers. Thank you for being a champion of high quality reading instruction and a leader in the field of education!

As I shared on the phone, students generally have one or two issues that keep them from becoming grade level proficient readers. The first issue is that we have some students that fail to learn to read at an early age. Through the power of science we have now proven techniques that can ensure that all students learn to read. The link below is to a very powerful short video that illustrates the ground breaking work that is taking place in improving reading achievement. The video can be accessed at <http://www.readingrockets.org/shows/launching/brain>.

The second reason that many students score level 1 and 2 on FCAT is because teachers have not been taught to use text based questioning and complex text to build the cognitive endurance of students. Here is a link to one of the authors of the Common Core Standards explaining the type of instruction that all teachers must provide if we are to teach students to understand text at a high level: <http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/resources/bringing-the-common-core-to-life.html>.

A very exciting discussion on teaching comprehension through Martin Luther King Birmingham jail letter begins at 41 minutes and reading the letter aloud begins around 51 minutes.

#### **Background**

One of the most compelling findings from recent reading research is that children who get off to a poor start in reading rarely catch up. As several studies have now documented, the poor first-grade reader almost invariably continues to be a poor reader (Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1996; Torgesen & Burgess, 1998). And the consequences of a slow start in reading become monumental as they accumulate exponentially over time. As Stanovich (1986) pointed out in his well-known paper on the "Matthew effects" (the rich get richer and the poor get poorer) associated with failure to acquire early word reading skills, these consequences range from negative attitudes toward reading (Oka & Paris, 1986), to reduced opportunities for vocabulary growth (Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1985), to missed opportunities for development of reading comprehension strategies (Brown, Palinscar, & Purcell, 1986), to less actual practice in reading than other children receive (Allington, 1984).

#### **The best solution to the problem of reading failure is to allocate resources for early identification and prevention.**

#### **New research from the Annie E. Casey Foundation:**

#### **Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation**

The findings include:

- One in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time, a rate four times greater than that for proficient readers.
- The rates are highest for the low, below-basic readers: 23 percent of these children drop out or fail to finish high school on time, compared to 9 percent of children with basic reading skills and 4 percent of proficient readers.
- Overall, 22 percent of children who have lived in poverty do not graduate from high school, compared to 6 percent of those who have never been poor. This rises to 32 percent for students spending more than half of their childhood in poverty.
- For children who were poor for at least a year *and* were not reading proficiently in third grade, the proportion that don't finish school rose to 26 percent. That's more than six times the rate for all proficient readers.
- The rate was highest for poor Black and Hispanic students, at 31 and 33 percent respectively—or about eight times the rate for all proficient readers.
- Even among poor children who were proficient readers in third grade, 11 percent still didn't finish high school. That compares to 9 percent of subpar third grade readers who have never been poor.
- Among children who never lived in poverty, all but 2 percent of the best third grade readers graduated from high school on time.
- Graduation rates for Black and Hispanic students who were not proficient readers in third grade lagged far behind those for White students with the same reading skills.

#### **Ensuring Better Results on FCAT.**

FCAT is text based reading test in that all of the answers to the test come from the passages. All students must be able to read at least 95% of the words fluently to free up working memory to process the text.

#### **Step I : Proper student placement in reading intervention**

In order to ensure placement of students in reading intervention that will most effectively accelerate their growth, it is critical that districts and schools create and implement a process with the students' best interests in mind. Districts should include principals, reading coaches, and guidance counselors in the development of district wide reading placement policies. At the school level, the principal should communicate this process with all guidance counselors, teachers, administrators, and the reading coach. The defined differentiated placement procedure will be used for student placement in reading interventions. Although technology assists in scheduling, the most impactful way of placing students combines both the ease of technology and the skillful professional decision making

of a dedicated educator. The basis for the decisions made include the understanding of students and teachers and their personalities, styles and depth of knowledge, understanding the nuances of the programs and materials, and making the best match.

**A sample process:**

- In early spring, prior to the release of FCAT scores, all students are initially scheduled into all courses except reading intervention by guidance counselors. Reading assessment data is then collected on a spreadsheet by student, including teacher recommendation and progress in the reading program for that year to assist in reading intervention placement.
- Here is an example of spreadsheet headers that could be used in such a process:

Student Name/ID	Grade	FCAT DSS, Level, History	Grade Level Passages Read Aloud / Comprehension Question Scores (Scaffolded Discussion Templates/ Lexile Passages / Grade Level Content Passages)	FAIR Reading Comprehension Percentile	FAIR Maze %ile	Curriculum Progress/ Intervention Data (Lexile, Grades, Curriculum Based Measures, etc)	Teacher Recommendation for next year's intervention program (includes IEP Team Recommendations)

- STEP 1

The reading coach meets with the guidance counselors and receives all student schedule request forms.

- STEP 2

The reading coach carefully reviews:

- the data (spreadsheet above)
- student schedule request forms for placement into highest requested electives as possible
- the intervention course schedule (program, teacher, section openings)
- graduation/course requirements

STEP 3

Students are scheduled into reading intervention courses appropriately.

It is important to ensure that students are placed in reading interventions with a double block as needed to accelerate reading achievement.

**Step 2: Changing the Way we teach for all students that score level 1 and 2 on FCAT but do not have a text reading issue.**

**Text Complexity, Text Based Question and Student Success**

1. **Text Complexity and Text Based Questions:** The Common Core Standards and success on FCAT, ACT and SAT require students to read increasingly complex texts with increasing independence and understanding as they progress towards career and college readiness.

**A. Texts for each grade should align with the complexity requirements outlined in the Standards.** Reading Standard 10 outlines the level of text complexity at which students need to demonstrate comprehension in each grade. Research makes clear that the complexity levels of the texts students are presently required to read are significantly below what is required to achieve college and career readiness. Far too often students who have fallen behind are given less complex texts rather than the support they need to read texts at the appropriate level of complexity. The Common Core Standards hinge on students encountering appropriately complex texts at each grade level in order to develop the mature language skills and the conceptual knowledge they need for success in school and life (Appendix A in the Common Core Standards gives further information on how text complexity can be measured). Instructional samples of complex text can be found in Appendix B of the Common Core Standards for all curriculum areas.

**B. All students, including students who are behind, have extensive opportunities to encounter and comprehend grade level text as required by the Standards.** Text aligned with the Core Standards must provide extensive opportunities for all students to engage in sufficiently complex text, although some will need more scaffolding to do so. In responding to the needs of students who are farthest behind, materials should reduce the complexity of the text as a last resort. In addition to classroom instruction on texts at their own grade level, some students may also need additional instruction, which could include approaches such as: guided reading instruction; fluency practice; and vocabulary building. However, this additional work should not replace extensive classroom use with texts at or above grade level, and all intervention programs should be designed to accelerate students rapidly towards independent reading of grade level text.

**C. Additional materials provide opportunities for students to engage in regular independent reading of materials that appeal to their interests in order to develop both their knowledge and joy in reading.** Students should have access to a wide range of materials on a variety of topics and genres in both their classroom and school libraries. These materials should ensure that all students have daily opportunities to read texts of their choice and on their own during and outside of the school day. These texts should enable students to read broadly and widely to build their knowledge and experience. These materials will need to include texts at students' own reading level as well as texts with complexity levels that will challenge and motivate students. In alignment with the Standards and to acknowledge the range of student interest, these materials should include informational texts and literary non-fiction as well as literature. A wide variety of formats can also engage a wider range of students, such as high quality newspaper and magazine articles as well as information rich web sites.

**D. Shorter, challenging texts that elicit close reading and re-reading are provided regularly at each grade.** The study of short texts is particularly useful to enable students at a wide range of reading levels to participate in the close analysis of more demanding text. The Common Core Standards place a high priority on the close, sustained reading of complex text, beginning with Reading Standard 1. Such reading emphasizes the particular over the general and strives to focus on what lies within the four corners of the text. Such close reading often requires compact, short, self-contained texts that students can read and re-read deliberately and slowly to probe and ponder the meanings of individual words, the order in which sentences unfold, and the development of ideas over the course of the text.

**E. Novels, plays, and other extended readings are also used with opportunities for close reading as well as research.** Students should also be required to read several longer texts each year. Discussion of extended or longer texts should span the entire text while also creating a series of questions that demonstrate how careful attention to specific passages within the text provides opportunities for close reading. Students should also be required to demonstrate that they can read larger volumes of material and extract knowledge and insight. Developing cognitive endurance is essential to all text based instruction.

**F. Scaffolds enable all students to experience the complexity of the text, rather than avoid it.** Many students will need careful instruction—including effective scaffolding—to enable them to read at the appropriate level of text complexity required by the Common Core Standards. However, the

scaffolding should not preempt or replace the text by translating its contents for students or telling students what they are going to learn in advance of reading the text; that is, the scaffolding should not itself become an alternate, simpler source of information that diminishes the need for students to read the text itself carefully. Effective scaffolding aligned with the Standards should result in the reader encountering the text on its own terms, providing helpful directions that focus students on the text. Followup support should guide the reader when encountering places in the text where he or she might struggle. When productive struggle with the text is exhausted, questions rather than explanations can help focus the student's attention to key phrases and statements in the text, or the organization of ideas in the paragraph.

2. **Range and Quality of Texts:** The Common Core Standards require a greater focus on informational text in elementary school and literary non-fiction in Grades 6-12.
  - A. **Grades 3-5: Literacy programs include texts that are 50% literature and 50% informational.** Achieving the appropriate balance between literary and informational text in the next generation of materials requires a significant shift in early literacy materials and instructional time so that equal time and weight is given to scientific and historical text as is given to literary text (see p. 31 of the Standards for details on how these two different types of texts are defined). In addition, in order to develop reading comprehension for all readers, as well as build vocabulary, the selected informational texts should build a coherent body of knowledge both within and across grades. The example of the Human Body (p. 35 in the Common Core Standards) offers one approach to fashioning a coherent body of knowledge in a domain both within and across grades.
  - B. **Grades 6-12: Instruction should include substantially more literary non-fiction.** The Common Core Standards require materials in Grades 6-12 to include a blend of literature (fiction, poetry, and drama) and a substantial sampling of literary non-fiction, including essays, speeches, opinion pieces, biographies, journalism, and historical, scientific or other documents written for a broad audience (see p. 57 of the Standards for more details). The Standards emphasize arguments (such as those in the Founding Documents) and other literary nonfiction built on informational text structures rather than narrative literary non-fiction that are structured as stories (such as memoirs or biographies). Of course, literary nonfiction extends well beyond historical documents to include the best of non-fiction written for a broad audience on a wide variety of topics, such as science, contemporary events and ideas, nature, and the arts. (Appendix B of the Common Core Standards provides several examples of high quality literary non-fiction.). Using the qualitative text complexity rating scales with content area teachers through lesson study will facilitate an deepening of instruction.
  - C. **Teachers and students are guided to analyze dense arguments and information at the heart of complex literary non-fiction.** The Common Core Standards emphasize the reading of more literary non-fiction, particularly literary non-fiction that makes an extended argument or provides dense scientific, historical, or technical information. This emphasis mirrors the Writing Standards that focus on students' abilities to marshal an argument and write to inform or explain. The shift in both reading and writing constitutes a significant change from the traditional focus in classrooms on narrative text or the narrative aspects of literary nonfiction (the characters and the story) towards more in depth engagement with the informational and argumentative aspects of these texts. For example, in a narrative with a great deal of science, teachers and students should be required to follow and comprehend the scientific information as presented by the text. Likewise, it is just as essential that teachers and students follow the details of an argument and reasoning in literary non-fiction as for them to attend to issues of style.
  - D. **Quality of the suggested texts is high—they are worth reading closely and exhibit exceptional craft and thought or provide useful information.** Given the emphasis of the Common Core Standards on close reading, the texts selected should be worthy of close attention and careful re-reading for understanding. To become career and college ready, students must grapple with a range of works that span many genres, cultures, and eras and model the kinds of thinking and writing students should aspire to in their own work. (See Appendix B of the Standards for grade specific examples of texts.)
3. **High Quality Text Dependent Questions and Tasks:** Among the highest priorities of the Common Core Standards is that students can read closely and gain knowledge from texts.
  - A. **A significant percentage of questions/tasks are text dependent.** Aligned curriculum materials should include rigorous text dependent questions that require students to demonstrate that they follow the details of what is explicitly stated but also are able to make valid claims that square with all the evidence in the text. Text dependent questions can only be answered by careful scrutiny of the text, and specifically by referring to evidence from the text itself to support the response. They do not require information or evidence from outside the text or texts; they establish what follows and what does not follow from the text itself. Between 80-90% of the Reading Standards in each grade require text dependent analysis; accordingly, aligned curriculum materials should have a similar percentage of text dependent questions. These can and should be applied to building knowledge from multiple sources as well as making connections between texts and learned material, according to the principle that each source be read and understood carefully before moving to additional sources.
  - B. **High quality sequences of text dependent questions elicit a sustained attention to the specifics of the text and their import.** A sequence of questions should cultivate student mastery of the details of the text as well as the significance of those particulars. Questions aligned with Common Core Standards should be focused on the unique qualities of the text and demand close attention to the text to answer fully. Such questions make students alert to the choices authors make and the impact of those choices on the meaning and literary force of the text. An effective set of questions might begin with relatively simple questions requiring attention to specific words, details, and arguments and then move on to explore the impact of those specifics on the text as a whole. Good questions will often linger over specific phrases and sentences to ensure careful comprehension. Effective question sequences will ensure that students learn to stay focused on the text so they can learn fully from it.
  - C. **Questions and tasks require the use of textual evidence, including supporting logical inferences from the text.** The Common Core Standards require students to become more adept at drawing evidence from the text and explaining that evidence orally and in writing. Aligned curriculum materials should include explicit models of high quality evidence-based answers to questions—samples of proficient student responses—about specific texts from each grade. Questions should require students to demonstrate that they follow the details of what is explicitly stated and are able to make non-trivial inferences beyond what is explicitly stated in the text to what logically follows from the evidence in the text. Evidence will play a similarly crucial role in student writing, speaking and listening; an increasing command of evidence in texts is essential to making progress in reading as well as the other literacy strands.
  - D. **Questions and tasks require careful comprehension of the text before asking for further connections, evaluation, or interpretation.** The Common Core Standards call for students to demonstrate a careful understanding of what they read before engaging their opinions, appraisals, or interpretations. Aligned instruction should therefore require students to demonstrate that they have followed the details and logic of an author's argument before they are asked to evaluate the thesis or compare the thesis to others. When engaging in critique, instruction should require students to return to the text to check the quality and accuracy of their evaluations and interpretations. Students can and should make connections between texts, but this activity must not supersede the close examination of each specific text. Often curricula surrounding texts leaps too quickly into broad and wide open questions of interpretation before cultivating command of the details and specific ideas in the text.
  - E. **Rather than emphasizing more general strategies and questions, text specific questions and tasks reinforce focus on the text and cultivate independence.** Often a great deal of the time that could be spent on reading the text closely is spent on extensive pre-reading activities and instruction in reading strategies. Practices such as framing a big question in advance of reading or previewing a text may in fact deprive students of the rich discoveries and intellectual joy of encountering the way an author sets the agenda and unfolds ideas as well as details. Recommended reading strategies as well as broader questions and themes should be embedded in the actual reading of the text rather than being taught as a separate body of material. A significant portion of the time spent with each text should provide opportunities for student independent work within and outside of class analyzing the text, since this independent analysis is required by the Standards.

Best,  
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