

School-Wide Elementary Literacy Practices in the Northeast

A Supplement to the The Knowledge Loom Web site's Elementary Literacy Spotlight
(<http://knowledgeloom.org/elemlit>)

This supplement to the Elementary Literacy spotlight presents eight shared practices of various elementary schools that significantly improved the literacy skills of their students. The practices are based upon regional studies of schools in the northeastern United States in the late 1990s. Researchers systematically identified what these schools did to improve literacy skills despite the low socio-economic status and limited community resources of some student populations. For each practice, a list of school success stories and online resources provides further information to educators interested in implementing these practices.

Date of download: 12/13/2004

Spotlight URL: <http://knowledgeloom.org/elne/>

Publisher: The Education Alliance, Brown University (<http://www.alliance.brown.edu>)

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The Knowledge Loom: Educators Sharing and Learning Together

<http://knowledgeloom.org>

This document is a supplement to The Knowledge Loom Web site's Elementary Literacy spotlight. Content on The Knowledge Loom is always being updated and changed. Check online for the most current information.

What is The Knowledge Loom?

The Knowledge Loom is an online professional development resource featuring specially organized spotlights on high-priority education issues, including:

- a list of promising practices (including an explanation of each practice and a summary of the research or theories that support the practice)
- stories about the practices in action in actual education settings
- lists of related resources found on other web sites.

The site is designed to help educators facilitate decision-making, planning, and benchmarking for improved teaching and learning through collaborative activities.

Are there other resources on The Knowledge Loom?

In addition to printable content, the site features interactive tools that allow users to share information and knowledge, read what panels of practitioners have to say about selected topics, ask questions of content experts, and print custom documents like this one. A companion guidebook, *Using The Knowledge Loom: Ideas and Tools for Collaborative Professional Development* (<http://knowledgeloom.org/guidebook>), can be downloaded. It offers activities and graphic organizers to support collaborative inquiry about what works in teaching and learning in support of school improvement.

What spotlight topics are currently available?

- Adolescent Literacy in the Content Areas
- Culturally Responsive Teaching
- Elementary Literacy
- Good Models of Teaching with Technology
- Leadership Principles in Technology
- Middle School Mathematics
- Principal as Instructional Leader
- Redesigning High Schools to Personalize Learning
- School, Family, and Community Partnerships
- Successful Professional Development
- Teaching for Artistic Behavior: Choice-Based Art

Overview of Supplement: School–Wide Elementary Literacy Practices in the Northeast

This document is a supplement to the Elementary Literacy spotlight on The Knowledge Loom Web site (<http://knowledgeloom.org/elemlit>). It provides information about nine school-wide literacy practices and detailed stories about schools implementing these practices.

In four separate studies of high performing schools in the northeastern United States—in Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts (in partnership with RMC Research Corporation) and Connecticut (studied by the National Education Goals Panel)—researchers systematically identified explicit early literacy practices and ascertained that these practices were not present in the same qualitative way in low performing schools. We have used their findings to generate practical definitions of principles for achieving high levels of early literacy.

The results of these studies do not preclude other effective practices by these states.

Practices

Each practice includes an explanation, a summary of each story that exemplifies the practice, a research summary (review of the literature), a reference list of the literature, and a short list of related Web resources (URLs and full annotations provided online or in the Related Web Resources section if it has been printed).

- Students can attain high levels of literacy when teachers believe that all students can succeed and when instruction is guided by student needs for literacy instruction.
- Students can attain high levels of literacy when their learning environment is varied, rich, and balanced.
- Students can attain high levels of literacy when time is dedicated to literacy instruction and to exposure to literacy.
- Students can attain high levels of literacy when teachers are well qualified to teach, especially through excellent preservice preparation and through ongoing and substantive professional development in literacy.
- Students can attain high levels of literacy when school staff and parents are partners.
- Students can attain high levels of literacy when the school staff actively and frequently uses student data to inform and improve instruction.
- Students can attain high levels of literacy when there is quality leadership and a championing of literacy.
- Students can attain high levels of literacy when school staff work together toward a shared vision and have genuine respect for each other.
- Students can demonstrate high levels of literacy when attention is given to tests and test taking.

Stories

The Stories correspond to the summaries printed as part of each practice published on The Knowledge Loom. These are detailed examples of how the practices look in action in educational settings.

"Carlisle" Elementary School
Arthur T. Talmadge Elementary School
Beeman Elementary School

Elwood School
Lawrence School (Elementary)
Mary Lyon School (K-8)
Naples School
Smith School (K-5)
Sommers School
South Creek School

Related Web Resources: 35

The titles and numbers at the end of each "Practice" section correspond to the 35 Web resources listed at the end of this document under "Related Web Resources."

Consult this annotated list for tools and tips to support the implementation of each practice.

Practices

This section presents the Knowledge Loom practices for the spotlight you selected.

Each practice includes an explanation, a summary of each story that exemplifies the practice, a research summary (review of the literature), a reference list of the literature, and a short list of related Web resources (URLs and full annotations provided online or in the Related Web Resources section of this document).

For an overview of additional content presented on The Knowledge Loom Web site that may not have been selected for this print document, see the Overview of Spotlight located earlier in the document.

Students can attain high levels of literacy when teachers believe that all students can succeed and when instruction is guided by student needs for literacy instruction.

The Practices	
The following are literacy practices from four studies of high-performing schools in the Northeast.	
RMC/Massachusetts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools are student-centered organizations with clear academic expectations for students.• Reading instruction occurs in small groups so that teachers can focus on students' individual needs.
Maine	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools appear to be "raising the bar" for student expectations.
Connecticut/NEGP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers identify children and delayed reading development early and provide intense interventions for them by the end of first grade.

Questions to think about

- When teachers believe that all students can succeed, how do they respond to learners who are struggling or delayed in meeting normal literacy milestones?
- When teachers believe that all students can succeed, how do they use standards, curricula, and assessments?
- When educators believe that all students can succeed, how do schools as organizations change?

Story Summaries

Lawrence School (Elementary)

- Daily running records of student reading
- Yearly state assessment
- Yearly action plans in response to assessment
- Reading Recovery: reading intervention for first–graders
- Consistent follow–up in subsequent grades
- 64% met state writing goals in 1998, compared to 19% in 1993
- Writing scores 6% higher than the average state scores
- 59% met state reading goals in 1998, compared to 44% in 1993
- Reading scores 5% higher than the average state scores

Lawrence School's transformation from low–performing to high–performing school began when the state mandated standards for all students. Three features reflect Lawrence's responsiveness to student literacy needs. One is the way that space is used. Every student seems to have been considered in the way each square foot of space creates space conducive to attaining instructional goals. Another feature is the flexible grouping and instruction based on student performance data throughout the grades. Third, staff members believe that all children can read, and they provide Reading Recovery, as an early intervention program for struggling first–grade beginning readers.

Smith School (K–5)

- 58% of students have non–English home languages
- 100% of staff planning teams include a bilingual teacher
- Full–day kindergarten for bilingual students
- Reading Recovery: early intervention for struggling readers
- SAIL/SOAR tutoring programs for 2nd grade
- Over five years, a 24% increase in the number of students reaching the state's reading goal
- Over five years, a 45% increase in the number of students reaching the state's writing goal

Five years ago, under the leadership of its principal, staff members began to "enrich" instruction, which was synonymous with personalizing instruction and engaging students through their interests. Additionally, the state mandated standards.

In August 2000 before the official start of the school year, the Knowledge Loom interviewed a group of staff members and the school principal. The staff became engaged in an animated discussion about the key to their school's strong progress in literacy. One staff member said that the key to their success has been their unified belief that all children can succeed. Bilingual students and teachers are always included in literacy efforts, especially in planning instruction.

Arthur T. Talmadge Elementary School

Performance grouping for students is key to the school's organization for literacy. The staff identify students who are potentially at risk by using a kindergarten screening process, and place students in performance groups at the beginning of the year in kindergarten and first grade. They continue to monitor progress carefully and provide additional services to enhance the students' likelihood of success. Since instruction is in small groups of 15 students, teachers are flexible and can pay attention to individual student needs.

- The school utilizes "homegrown" assessment tools at the beginning of kindergarten and first grade to place students in small groups and monitor early literacy.
- Because instruction is in small groups over a two-hour block, students have time to read and write with their teacher everyday.
- Different groups use different materials, mainly basal readers supplemented with a variety of other materials.
- The school employs a consistent philosophy and focus on teaching both word attack skills (like phonics) and reading comprehension.

Research Summary

* * * * *

"This set of findings is critical from the vantage point of Connecticut's former commissioner of education, Gerald N. Tirozzi, who reminded us that, 'Policy begins when the teacher closes the classroom door.' Unless teachers respond, state and local policies do not have much effect." —Joan Boykoff Baron

* * * * *

In Massachusetts, the RMC/LAB study (1998) of high performing high-poverty urban schools found a shared belief among staff members "that all children can learn to read and write; they believe that, as teachers, they can collectively help children realized those goals. Staff members take it upon themselves to do whatever is necessary to realize those shared beliefs. Schools are characterized by a staff sense of ownership and responsibility and a 'can do' attitude is pervasive" (p.10).

Joan Boykoff Baron's study (1999) for the National Education Goals Panel, **Exploring High and Improving Reading Achievement in Connecticut**, examined the factors related to improving students' reading performance and related to Connecticut's high performance. Baron reviewed results of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMT) assessments, and she interviewed Connecticut educators. Her study details the practices of the state that scored highest on the 1998 NAEP exam and was the most-improved state in reading scores since 1992. The study specifically examines why white, black, and Hispanic students in Connecticut all performed better than their counterparts in other states.

In her report, Baron (1999) states, "From the Coleman Report (Coleman, et al., 1966) until today (Grissmer, 1998), researchers have demonstrated the strong statistical relationship of two variables—family income and parents' education levels—with student achievement. However, Connecticut's improvement in reading, as opposed to its absolute level of performance, cannot be explained by the high income and education levels of its parents" (pp. 9–10). "Whereas Connecticut's wealth, race/ethnicity and parental education can be used to explain the state's high achievement in reading, they cannot explain Connecticut's strong improvement in reading between 1992 and 1998. All of the changes in those variables would predict lower scores; in 1998, Connecticut had lower median income, more persons [below] the poverty index, and a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic students than it had in 1992" (Baron, pp.19–20).

The ten districts demonstrate the reality of their belief that all students can succeed in their shared commitment to early identification of delayed reading development and treatment for them by the end of first grade. Children were not left to "outgrow" their delayed difficulties. (Baron, pp. 51–52).

The Vermont Reading Project (Lipson, Mekkelson, Mosenthal, Russ, Sortino, 2000), a partnership of the Northeast Regional Educational Laboratory, the Vermont State Department of Education, and the University of Vermont, also found successful literacy practices across all socio-economic levels. They looked for schools in which at least 80% of the students at grade 2 and grade 4 performed at or above the standard on the VT Developmental Reading Assessment (administered at 2nd grade) and the New Standards Reference Exam, Reading Subtests (administered at 4th grade) during the Spring of 1998. They found five schools or 6% of 79 poor rural schools; eight schools or 8% of 104 non-urban; non-rural, mainly middle-income schools; and 5 schools or 14% of 36 affluent schools. Among the practices common to these high-performing schools, they found an eight to ten-year commitment to improving performance and provision of ample time and opportunities for all students to read and discuss books (Lipson, Mekkelson, Mosenthal, Russ, & Sortino, 2000, p.1).

Principal Studies:

Connecticut

Baron, J. B. (1999). Exploring high and improving reading achievement in Connecticut. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Massachusetts

RMC Research Corporation and the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University. (1998). Indicators of capacity for school reform project: Massachusetts literacy study. Report of phase I findings. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

Vermont

Lipson, M. Y., Mekkelsen, J., Mosenthal, J. H., Russ, B., & Sortino, S. (2000). Contexts and practices of successful schools within a standards-based environment. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

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Fisher, C., & Adler, M.A. (1999, December). Early reading in high-poverty schools: Emerald Elementary beats the odds. (CIERA Report #3-009). Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, University of Michigan. See <http://www.ciera.org/ciera/publications/report-series/inquiry-3/3-009.pdf>

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Shields, P., Knapp, M., & Wechsler, M. (1995). Improving schools from the bottom up: From effective schools to restructuring. Summary volume. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Education.

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). Preventing reading difficulties in young children. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

- See Chapter 7 for organizational strategies centered on student needs at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch7.html>

- See Chapter 8 for early intervention strategies at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch8.html>
- See Chapter 10 for early identification and intervention strategies at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch10.html>

Taylor, B.M., Pearson, P.D., Clark, K.F., & Walpole, S. (1999, September). Beating the odds in teaching all children to read. (CIERA Report #2-006). Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, University of Michigan. See <http://www.ciera.org/ciera/publications/report-series/inquiry-2/2-006.pdf>

Related Web Resources

Children's Speech and Language Developmental Milestones (15)

Developmental Characteristics of Children: Birth – 11 years (6)

ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education. Reading: the First Chapter In Education. (1996) (7)

The Early Literacy Advisor: An assessment system that shapes instruction (14)

Tip Sheets for Finding and Serving Children Who Most Need Help in Reading. America Reads Challenge. (8)

Students can attain high levels of literacy when their learning environment is varied, rich, and balanced.

The Practices	
The following are literacy practices from four studies of high-performing schools in the Northeast.	
RMC/Massachusetts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy is taught through a range of techniques that combine literature-based and phonics approaches and provides students with continual opportunities for applying literacy skills.
Vermont	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quantity of books in the school and /or classrooms is extensive. • Teachers read aloud to children often.
Maine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools are making increasing use of multiple resources to create a print-rich environment that strives for a balanced literacy approach.
Connecticut/NEGP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers use a variety of intervention strategies and experts to accelerate the development of delayed readers. • Teachers emphasize phonemic awareness in K and first grade. • Teachers use a wide variety of reading materials to address different instructional needs within the same classrooms. • Teachers and administrators describe their reading program as "balanced" between work analysis skills and

	<p>comprehension strategies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers reinforce reading skills on a daily basis through writing.• Teachers use systematic spelling programs to help each other and/or reinforce the regularities (and irregularities) of the English language.
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Questions to think about

- If there is controversy over which reading method should be used in your state, district, or school, what seem to be the sources of conflict? The preferences of individual teachers? Of literacy specialists? Of principals? The preferences of parents? The preferences of local or state policymakers? Continued. . . Absence of a clear position about methods? Inadequate pre-service preparation of teachers? A lack of resources, coordination, and support services?
- What do teachers and administrators need in order to make informed decisions about the methods to use for teaching reading to students with diverse learning needs (not limited to English language learners)?
- What structural and organizational changes need to take place so that this principle can be applied? Consider the following: formats for grouping students for instruction; daily schedule changes and other uses of time; instruction for struggling readers; optimizing human resources and roles; professional development formats; and access to books and to other genres of literature.

Story Summaries

Beeman Elementary School

- Multi-age classrooms (1st–2nd grades and 3rd–4th grades)
- Storybooks, "Step" books, trade books
- No single approach to instruction by all teachers
- 3rd–4th grades use literature-based discussion
- DEAR (Drop Everything and Read): sustained in-class silent reading time
- Literacy block scheduling with no interruptions
- From 0% of staff in group professional development (PD) to 100% participation in a phonological development course
- 100% of teachers spend one day a month off-site in team planning
- Common PD reading list
- University courses

Virtually all staff used some language suggesting that they were eclectic. Says one teacher of a combination grade 3–4 classroom: "Reading has a lot of different faces and it happens several different times throughout every day of the week. So I would say there isn't just one way I teach reading." Consistent with this view, teachers at the school draw from a wide variety of materials including Storybox and other little books, "Step" books, and trade books. There is virtually no commercial program among these teachers, although they do draw on methodologies that they have acquired (e.g. individualized, self–selected reading, guided reading, word walls, phonological awareness training, etc.).

Research Summary

In the RMC/LAB study (1998) of high–poverty urban Massachusetts schools that scored significantly higher than other schools in their districts, staff in the schools used a wide range of reading techniques and materials and assessment strategies. The data indicate that the literacy programs of these schools combine literature–based and phonics–based approaches (pp. 6–7).

The Vermont Reading Project (Lipson, Mekkelsen, Mosenthal, Russ, & Sortino, 2000), a partnership of the Northeast Regional Educational Laboratory, the Vermont State Department of Education, and the University of Vermont, looked for schools in which at least 80% of the students at grade 2 and grade 4 performed at or above the standard on the VT Developmental Reading Assessment (administered at 2nd grade) and the New Standards Reference Exam, Reading Subtests (administered at 4th grade) during the Spring of 1998. In combination with high levels of teacher expertise and lively instruction, researchers found a variety of approaches in Vermont's high–performing schools rather than any single approach to instruction shared across schools.

Baron's study (1999) found that "undergirding the wide variety of materials and strategies used in these ten districts were eight common features" (p. 42). "Direct instruction in phonemic awareness and phonological skills for all children in kindergarten and those who need it in first and second grade was specifically mentioned by more than half of the districts interviewed—and was prevalent across the full range of Education Reference Groups"(p. 44).

"Note 3: Through interviews with reading specialists in Branford, Monroe, and Greenwich, it became clear that much of the commitment to phonemic awareness in Connecticut schools can be traced to two factors. The first is that Connecticut is home to one of the world's leading research facilities on the linguistic basis of reading—Haskins Laboratories, a research affiliate of both the University of Connecticut and Yale University—which has received funds from NICHD since 1965 to study reading acquisition and reading disabilities (see Shankweiler, 1999, for a review of Haskins' research). The implications of the Laboratory's research have been made available to Connecticut teachers and administrators as well as to the international research community. The second is that some of the seminal phonemic awareness research in the United States was conducted more than 25 years ago by Isabell Y. Liberman, a former professor of educational psychology at the University of Connecticut. Professor Liberman's students have played important roles in teacher–preparation programs and research institutions. In addition, and directly pertinent to the growth of Connecticut's students in reading, they have attained supervisory positions in some of the State's school districts—both in the regular and special education programs—and in those roles have developed and implemented strong kindergarten programs to teach phonemic awareness followed by the explicit relationships between spoken sounds and alphabetical symbols. Consequently, by 1993, through these channels, phonemic awareness had found its way into many Connecticut schools (1999, Anne Fowler, personal communication)" (Baron, 1999, p.42).

"In lieu of a single ideological approach, eclecticism and pragmatism best characterize the instructional practices and reading materials being used in the ten most improved Connecticut districts. Every district spoke of the 'balance' it aimed to achieve between teaching students skills to decode new words and deriving understanding from engaging literature and nonfiction texts. In several of these districts, there seemed to be a genuine commitment to a dual focus on early listening comprehension and explicit phonemic awareness and decoding skills. They also described the balance between reading and writing" (Baron, 1999, pp. 41–42).

Teachers reported four kinds of books used with beginning readers (Baron, 1999, pp. 45–46):

1. Authentic children's literature to be read aloud for enjoyment and to enhance motivation to read
2. Predictable, patterned books to be read aloud for enjoyment, comprehension, and motivation
3. Decodable texts, also called phonetically controlled reading materials
4. Leveled books, fact and fiction

Principal Studies:

Connecticut

Baron, J. B. (1999). Exploring high and improving reading achievement in Connecticut. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Massachusetts

RMC Research Corporation and the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University. (1998). Indicators of capacity for school reform project: Massachusetts literacy study. Report of phase I findings. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

Vermont

Lipson, M. Y., Mekkelsen, J., Mosenthal, J. H., Russ, B., & Sortino, S. (2000). Contexts and practices of successful schools within a standards-based environment. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

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Fisher, C., & Adler, M.A. (1999, December). Early reading in high-poverty schools: Emerald Elementary beats the odds. (CIERA Report #3-009). Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, University of Michigan. See <http://www.ciera.org/ciera/publications/report-series/inquiry-3/3-009.pdf>

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Juel, C., & Minden-Cupp, C. (1999, December). One down and 80,000 to go: Word recognition instruction in the primary grades. Online@CIERA article #99-02. See <http://www.ciera.org/ciera/publications/online-at-ciera/99-02/art-online-99-02.html> For published version, see the December, 1999 Reading Teacher.

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Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). Preventing reading difficulties in young children. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

- See Chapter 2 for information on the process of learning to read at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch2.html>
- See Chapter 3 for information about children who have reading difficulties at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch3.html>
- See Chapter 4 for predictors of success and failure in learning to read at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch4.html>
- See Chapter 6 for instructional strategies for kindergarten and the primary grades at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch6.html>

Taylor, B.M., Pearson, P.D., Clark, K.F., & Walpole, S. (2000). Beating the odds in teaching all children to read. (CIERA Report #2-006). Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, University of Michigan. See

<http://knowledgeloom.org/elne/>

download: 02/10/2005

<http://www.ciera.org/ciera/publications/report-series/inquiry-2/2-006.pdf>

Wharton-McDonald, R., Pressley, M., & Mistretta-Hampston, J. (1998). Literacy instruction in nine first-grade classrooms: Teacher characteristics and student achievement. *The Elementary School Journal*, 99 (2), 101-128.

Related Web Resources

Improving the Reading Achievement of America's Children (16)

Statement on Phonemic Awareness: International Reading Association (9)

Students can attain high levels of literacy when time is dedicated to literacy instruction and to exposure to literacy.

The Practices	
RMC/Massachusetts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school places an emphasis on reading and literacy that results in considerable time spent on literacy instruction as well as extended reading and writing time to increase exposure to literacy.
Vermont	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everybody in the school spends a great deal of time reading and discussing books. • There is a very lively pace of instruction; time is spent on instruction and practice (versus management). • There is block scheduling dedicated to instruction and literacy. • There has been a long-term commitment to literacy and literacy improvement (5+ years).
Connecticut/NEGP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased amount of time made available for reading instruction.

Questions to think about

- ◆ What structural and organizational changes need to take place so that this principle can be applied? Formats for grouping students for instruction Daily schedule changes and other uses of time Instruction for struggling readers Human resources and roles Professional development formats Access to books and to other genres of literature
- ◆ What are the barriers to a long term commitment to literacy? What are the possible incentives for teachers? For a school? For a district? For a state department of education? For policy makers?

Story Summaries

Arthur T. Talmadge Elementary School

The school is organized by block schedule, with all teachers taking responsibility for small groups of students for reading and writing, including specialists. Instruction occurs in small groups so that teachers can focus on student needs, and devote extended time for reading and writing. The small performance groupings and extended time, together with a consistent approach to literacy and school planning, support flexibility and continuing improvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

- ◆ Consistent strategies with a variety of materials taught in a block of 100–120 minutes per day for reading and writing.
- ◆ Instructional focus on meeting the needs of all students, not just the middle of the class.
- ◆ Pullout programs for reading and writing are extended; every teacher is responsible for literacy performance of a student group.
- ◆ Block scheduling all day long
- ◆ Longer school day includes before school academic program
- ◆ The school provides a print-rich environment with common standards for reading and writing, including, for example, physical education and health classes.

Naples School

- ◆ 60 minutes per day of silent reading time
- ◆ 40 minutes daily of teacher "read-aloud" time
- ◆ School library visits twice per week for approximately 30 minutes
- ◆ Staff selected for high value placed on literacy
- ◆ Extensive reading in subject area studies

Working from a stable school environment, Naples School (a pseudonym) has built on the perception of its teachers' autonomy and expertise. The school has constructed an individualized, self-selected reading program based in literature. The teachers offer unique teaching styles and expertise. The principal of 20+ years and the librarian have inspired the vision of reading as a way of living in a classical sense, with books and thinking as the essence of existence. Students have silent reading time for approximately 60 minutes per day, and it is a strong tradition that teachers read aloud daily for approximately 40 minutes. Children at Naples utilize the school library two times per week for approximately 30 minutes, again to read and browse for books. They also visit the library one other time to meet with the librarian for ongoing genre/author discussions. Aside from the 15-minute per day word level work (primarily in spelling), the children at Naples predominantly read and appreciate literature and read extensively in their subject area studies.

Smith School (K–5)

- ◆ 90-minute literacy block scheduling
- ◆ Full-day Kindergarten for bilingual students
- ◆ After-school literacy programs

- ◆ Weekly professional development
- ◆ Summer teacher institutes and workshops
- ◆ Class-size reduction
- ◆ Home Literacy Connections program
- ◆ Summer School and Governor's Summer Reading Program
- ◆ Public library partnership
- ◆ 24% increase of students reaching the reading state goal in 5 years
- ◆ 45% increase of students reaching the writing state goal in 5 years
- ◆ The index for Grade 4 reading in the state mastery test increased from 36.4 in 1993 to 55.2 in 1998
- ◆ Five years as a benchmark for implementing state standards effectively

Smith School has for more than five years steadily integrated a state standards initiative and a strong award-winning Title I program to develop systemic school change.

Time spent on literacy has been increasingly intensified and expanded. Across the grades, block scheduling assures time for intense, uninterrupted time on task. After-school literacy programs, full-day kindergarten, and class-size reduction supplement core literacy time. A student returns to his or her third-grade teacher for grade four, an important year for statewide testing. By using this approach, "looping," no time is lost identifying skill sets that need bolstering.

Research Summary

The Vermont Reading Project (Lipson, Mekkelsen, Mosenthal, Russ, & Sortino, 2000), a partnership of the Northeast Regional Educational Laboratory, the Vermont State Department of Education, and the University of Vermont, looked for schools in which at least 80% of the students at grade 2 and grade 4 performed at or above the standard on the VT Developmental Reading Assessment (administered at 2nd grade) and the New Standards Reference Exam, Reading Subtests (administered at 4th grade) during the Spring of 1998. They found that high performing schools provide more time than low performing schools for reading and discussing books. Low performing schools provided time for reading for 25 to 40 minutes a day, while high performing schools ranged from 40 to 70 minutes per day.

Baron's study (1999) reports that it appears unlikely that average class size, average hours of instruction per year, or average student attendance can explain Connecticut's improved reading achievement (p. 33). Nevertheless, among seven organizational factors that districts identified as being related to their improvement in reading was the increase of time available for reading instruction, an indicator different from total instructional time. Districts used several approaches to increase the amount of instructional time for reading available to students both during the school day and during vacations (p. 40).

In the RMC/LAB study (1998) of high-poverty urban Massachusetts schools that scored significantly higher than other schools in their districts, researchers found that every school schedules reading instruction five days per week. Time specifically allocated to reading instruction ranges from 40 to 150 minutes per day. In several cases, uninterrupted morning blocks have been created and activities are designed to

ensure that each child is reading or writing for the entire block. In addition, home, after-school, and vacation activities encouraged interest and skills in literacy.

Principal Studies:

Connecticut

Baron, J.B. (1999). Exploring high and improving reading achievement in Connecticut. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Massachusetts

RMC Research Corporation and the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University (1998). Indicators of capacity for school reform project: Massachusetts literacy study. Report of phase I findings. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

Vermont

Lipson, M. Y., Mekkelsen, J., Mosenthal, J. H., Russ B., &Sortino, S. (2000). Contexts and practices of successful schools within a standards-based environment. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

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NEA Task Force. (2000, February). Report of the NEA task force on Reading 2000. Submitted to and adopted by the NEA Board of Directors, Washington, D.C.

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- ◆ See Chapter 6 for characteristics of high-quality instructional practices at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch6.html>
- ◆ See Chapter 8 for helping K-3 children with reading difficulties at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch8.html>

Taylor, B.M., Pearson, P.D., Clark, K.F., & Walpole, S. (2000). Beating the odds in teaching all children to read. (CIERA Report #2-006). Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, University of Michigan. See <http://www.ciera.org/ciera/publications/report-series/inquiry-2/2-006.pdf>

Related Web Resources

ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education. Principles for Learning to Read (10)

Tips for Teachers Who Want to Encourage Reading (11)

Students can attain high levels of literacy when teachers are well qualified to teach, especially through excellent preservice preparation and through ongoing and substantive professional development in literacy.

The Practices	
RMC/Massachusetts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Professional development opportunities provided for administrators and teachers to learn the skills required to improve students' reading.
Vermont	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ High quality, expertise, and commitment of their work characterize the K–4 teachers. These teachers are knowledgeable and articulate.
Connecticut/NEGP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ High pay and standards for teachers that allow local districts to recruit and retain high–quality teachers. Emphasis on beginning teachers. ◆ Teacher evaluation is linked to student achievement.

Questions to think about

- Studies have shown the effectiveness of professional development in which teachers collaborate on an ongoing basis around student work. What forms of this approach would be viable in your context?
- How can pre–service preparation at institutions of higher learning be aligned with state and school standards and children's diverse literacy needs?
- What policies and what structural and organizational changes need to take place so that this principle can be applied?

Story Summaries

"Carlisle" Elementary School

- "Teach to their strengths" teacher specialists in reading, writing, science/health, and math
- Daily teacher collaboration during lunch hour
- Teachers proposed a new model of instructional practice
- 100% of teachers took "Supportive Classroom" and "Guided Reading" courses
- Use same strategies and same terms in primary grades
- Principal's support in teachers' innovation
- High library collaboration that makes sure the library holds books for the broad range of students' needs
- 80% of 2nd-graders meet the state standard for reading

The small size of the school and its staff has been a plus. One energetic and inspiring colleague influenced her colleagues, modeled strategies, took her teammates along to conferences, and shared her enthusiasm for a methodology she believed really made a difference for individual children. Her colleagues, in turn, took "Supportive Classroom" and "Guided Reading" courses.

The two teachers who teach grades 3–4 also work closely together and make decisions in a similar way. They continually evaluate and "tinker" with the systems and programs they have in place to make learning "work" for the children. They refer to this process as setting their own initiative for their own learning, with support from the principal.

Mary Lyon School (K–8)

- All of the teachers hold Master's degrees, and all of the classroom teachers are dually certified in both regular and special education.
- The Mary Lyon is a designated professional development school. Both Wheelock College and Boston College send graduate students to learn how to work on a multidisciplinary team.
- Teachers work together in cross-grade level teams and in study groups.

"We look at teacher assignments and student work together. We are part of the 21st century Annenberg Challenge cohort, and across the cohort we look at the assignments teachers give alongside student work," explains Principal Mary Nash. "The school utilizes city and state frameworks as well as national standards to develop practices that assist teachers in designing lesson plans. We have study groups, too. We find common questions and problems that the whole faculty works on together."

Sommers School

- 160 Vermont students in grades K–8
- Families mostly poor and poorly educated
- "Homegrown," teacher-motivated professional development focused on literacy
- Teachers trained in Reading Recovery program for at-risk primary students
- Children using the same strategies, terms, and language throughout the primary grades

Over the past 10 years, Sommers School (a pseudonym) has reached agreement on a focused, responsive approach to literacy instruction through the principles of Reading Recovery, a research-based program of instruction tailored to the needs of at-risk, primary grade students. The program's practices and adaptations by the Sommers teachers are well matched to the student

population, to the rural, remote environment, and to the diminished literacy skills the children bring to school. The faculty recognize that their approach to literacy has allowed them to "know the knower," or teach responsively to individual children. In addition, they argue that this approach has influenced student performance because of the consistent instruction that has resulted. They point to the importance of the children using the same strategies, terms, and language throughout the primary grades. This story highlights the ownership of change that has developed at Sommers. The change came from extensive professional development of the homegrown variety, relying heavily upon teacher mentoring and collegiality.

Research Summary

The Vermont Reading Project (Lipson, Mekkelsen, Mosenthal, Russ, & Sortino, 2000), a partnership of the Northeast Regional Educational Laboratory, the Vermont State Department of Education, and the University of Vermont, looked for schools in which at least 80% of the students at grade 2 and grade 4 performed at or above the standard on the VT Developmental Reading Assessment (administered at 2nd grade) and the New Standards Reference Exam, Reading Subtests (administered at 4th grade) during the Spring of 1998. In the high performing schools, they found the K–4 teachers knowledgeable and articulate about their work, with high levels of expertise, and they found a longterm commitment to literacy improvement through extensive professional development (p. 1).

Joan Boykoff Baron's study (1999) for the National Education Goals Panel cites Connecticut's 1986 Education Enhancement Act (EEA) as the source of higher teacher salaries and higher teacher standards, both mentioned by administrators as factors in raising their level of reading instruction. "Within five years of the passage of the EEA, Connecticut teachers were paid the highest per diem salary in the world, \$261 per day (Education in the States and Nations, 1991, Indicator 35)" (p. 28).

In raising the standards for incoming teachers, the State implemented in 1989 The Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program, which for entrance requires passing tests of reading, writing, mathematics, and a subject knowledge test (PRAXIS II). Having entered the program, the beginning teacher receives the one-on-one support of a mentor, an experienced teacher in the same school, and attends seminars for new teachers. Since 1997, new teachers have received support for preparing for two additional forms of assessment: The Connecticut Competency Instrument (CCI) and a teaching portfolio (Baron, 1999, p. 29).

In Baron's study (1999), one of the seven organizational factors that districts related to improvement in reading was professional development. Administrators report that if teachers are expected to teach differently, they must have opportunities to develop new skills and strategies. "Consequently, several of the districts interviewed invest heavily in ongoing professional development" (p. 38).

Strategies for professional development use teacher collaboration centered on solving problems together around specific student performance. Strategies include working directly with students in coaching and modeling formats or using strong instructional leaders to lead development of curricula and lesson plans (Baron, 1999, p. 38).

In the RMC/LAB study (1998) of high-poverty urban Massachusetts schools that scored significantly higher than other schools in their districts, all twelve schools had sponsored professional development in reading/language arts instruction in the 24 months preceding the data collection (p. 11). Additionally, professional development took the form of meetings to examine student work and instruction in order to identify new approaches or materials to meet the needs of individual students.

Professional development also included coaching, mentoring, and demonstration of lessons by a school-based literacy coach. Teachers spent up to 50 hours per year on literacy professional development (p. 11).

Principal Studies:

Connecticut

Baron, J. B. (1999). Exploring high and improving reading achievement in Connecticut. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Massachusetts

RMC Research Corporation and the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University (1998). Indicators of capacity for school reform project: Massachusetts literacy study. Report of phase I findings. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

Vermont

Lipson, M. Y., Mekkelsen, J., Mosenthal, J. H., Russ, B., &Sortino, S. (2000). Contexts and practices of successful schools within a standards-based environment. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

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Fisher, C., &Adler, M.A. (1999, December). Early reading in high-poverty schools: Emerald Elementary beats the odds. (CIERA Report #3-009). Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, University of Michigan. See <http://www.ciera.org/ciera/publications/report-series/inquiry-3/3-009.pdf>

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(1996). Teachers' professional community in restructuring schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 33, 757–798. Moats, L.C. (1999). Teaching reading IS rocket science: What expert teachers of reading should know and be able to do. Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers. See <http://www.aft.org/edissues/rocketscience.htm>

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Shields, P., Knapp, M., & Wechsler, M. (1995). *Improving schools from the bottom up: From effective schools to restructuring. Summary volume*. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Education.

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.) (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. See the following chapters for teacher education and professional development:

- Chapter 9 at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch9.html>
- Chapter 10 at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch10.html>

Taylor, B.M., Pearson, P.D., Clark, K.F., & Walpole, S. (1999, September). Beating the odds in teaching all children to read. (CIERA Report #2–006). Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, University of Michigan. See <http://www.ciera.org/ciera/publications/report-series/inquiry-2/2-006.pdf>

Related Web Resources

America Goes Back to School: Recruiting and Preparing Quality Teachers (17)

Building Bridges: The Mission and Principles of Professional Development (2)

Excellent Reading Teachers: Position Statement Summary of the International Reading Association (2000). (22)

Helping Teachers Teach Well: Transforming Professional Development. (1995). CPRE Policy Briefs. (13)

Helping Teachers Through High-Quality Professional Development (12)

Teaching Reading IS Rocket Science: What Expert Teachers of Reading Should Know and Be Able To Do (23)

Students can attain high levels of literacy when school staff and parents are partners.

The Practices	
RMC/Massachusetts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School staff view parents as literacy partners and they have defined important roles for parents.
Maine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools have multiple ways of communicating with parents.
Connecticut/NEGP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are involved in the work of the schools.

Questions to think about

- In your context, what are useful partnerships between school staff and parents?
- What are possible formats for partnerships that will engage parents in their child's literacy?

Story Summaries

Arthur T. Talmadge Elementary School

"We are proud of our team and our relationship with parents. Parents drive their children to school so that the children can participate in a tutorial program before school starts," explains Principal Jack Fitzgerald. Parents perform this service to the school so that the children who need supplementary reading and writing can receive extra academic attention. The school depends on parents to support its high standards and expectations so that all students will do their best.

- An active Parent Teacher Organization raises money for the school.
- Parent volunteers read aloud with students in school and in monthly special "read alouds."
- The school holds "Meet the teacher" nights, conferences with parents, and special reading events for families.
- Parents sign off on spelling or other work weekly.
- Teachers seek parent support to make sure regularly assigned homework is completed as well as a reading assignment over the summer.

Mary Lyon School (K–8)

- A whole school team approach to learning fosters regular conferences with parents.
- The school organizes a parent support group around standardized testing.
- Two parent liaisons, with training by the Boston Public Schools and support from teachers, offer workshops for parents.
- School staff requests that parents read to their children at least 15 minutes every day.
- Teachers assign homework regularly and seek parent support to make sure it is completed.

The Mary Lyon School has parent-to-parent trainings about standards. "First parents meet with teachers so they understand what the content standards are, and what the performance standards are. They learn the difference. They see what the kids have to learn in a subject area and what they have to do to show that. Everyone needs clarity around literacy practices and content standards and performance standards. But parents teach other parents. That way everybody can understand." (Mary Nash, Principal, Mary Lyon School)

Lawrence School (Elementary)

- Kindergarten and 1st grade students take home books nightly to read with a parent
- Active Home-School Association/PTA provides financial and volunteer support
- Principal writes a bi-weekly newsletter with literacy tips for parents
- Family outreach worker employed to sustain family involvement
- Parents and staff develop school improvement plan together
- 64% met state writing goals in 1998, compared to 19% in 1993
- Writing scores 6% higher than the average state scores
- 59% met state reading goals in 1998, compared to 44% in 1993
- Reading scores 5% higher than the average state scores

Lawrence School is a learning community. One of the principal's roles as literacy leader is to build serious partnerships with parents. Families assist in the development of the school improvement plan. Lawrence parents volunteer time to help increase the quality of instruction. An active Home-school Association/PTA provides volunteer and financial support. The principal writes a bi-weekly newsletter with tips for developing literacy skills and parents attend workshops in early literacy development. In the Bag-a-Book program, K-1 readers take home books to read with a parent. The school employs a family outreach worker and a school family literacy coordinator, and the district employs a parent resource coordinator.

Research Summary

Baron's study (1999) of the most improved Connecticut schools found that the successful districts involved parents in improving the reading of their own and other children. They participated on site-based management teams, in parent-teacher groups, at Family Resource Centers, and by preparing for their own General Education Diploma (GED) or by attending other adult-education programs.

The study highlights the importance of parents' reading to their children and working with them at home. Districts also made efforts to assure parents' understanding of Connecticut Mastery Test results and invested in promoting parent volunteers. Schools aimed at high levels of participation and in one case offered training for a program that teaches pre-reading and reading (Baron, 1999, p. 39).

In the RMC/LAB study (1998) of high-poverty urban Massachusetts schools that scored significantly higher than other schools in their districts, parents participated in the decision-making process around their child's literacy environment (school library program, school's reading approaches). Schools held sessions to inform parents about the reading program and of the importance of literacy. School staff requested that parents read to their children at least fifteen minutes every day. Staff also involved parents with homework assignments and with completion of homework (RMC Research, 1998, p.13).

Principal Studies:

Connecticut

Baron, J. B. (1999). Exploring high and improving reading achievement in Connecticut. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Massachusetts

RMC Research Corporation and the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University. (1998). Indicators of capacity for school reform project: Massachusetts literacy study. Report of phase I findings. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

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volunteers. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. See Chapter 6.

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<http://www.ciera.org/ciera/publications/report-series/inquiry-2/2-006.pdf>

Related Web Resources

America Goes Back to School: Activity and Event Suggestions for Partnering (29)

America Goes Back to School: Following Up on Your Partnership (26)

America Goes Back to School: Ideas for Long-term Partnerships (30)

America Goes Back to School: Involving Students as Partners (31)

America Goes Back to School: Publicity About Your Partnership (19)

America Goes Back to School: Steps to Building Local Partnerships (4)

America Goes Back to School: Suggested Planning Calendar (18)

America Goes Back to School: Worksheet for Planning Local Partnerships (5)

Checklist of Community Resources for Partnerships (27)

Compact for Reading (1)

Simple Things You Can Do To Help All Children Read Well and Independently by the End of the Third Grade (32)

Tips for Parents to Encourage Reading (20)

Students can attain high levels of literacy when the school staff actively and frequently uses student data to inform and improve instruction.

The Practices	
RMC/Massachusetts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School staff actively use student work and assessments and other types of data to inform and improve instruction.
Maine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful schools pay attention to data concerning student performance.
Connecticut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic data collection and user–friendly reporting mechanisms (multiple and useful reports) • Continuous monitoring of student achievement and reading proficiency

Questions to think about

- What forms of data would contribute to important aspects of literacy instruction?
- What would school staff need to be able to use data to improve teaching and learning? What would they need from their district? From their state department of education?

Story Summaries

Mary Lyon School (K–8)

- The school examines student work samples and teacher assignments, running records, and standardized test data.
- The school uses formative assessment tools at the beginning, middle and end of the year, including the Observation Survey and Running Record for emerging readers in kindergarten and first grade.
- The Scholastic Reading Inventory and/or the Developmental Reading Assessment are used for grades 2–8.
- Lesson plans are based on data about student performance in relation to standards.

- Instruction is guided by student needs and expectations that all students can reach proficiency.
- Teachers employ special education strategies with all students to teach literacy in a kinesthetic way.

At the Mary Lyon School, instruction occurs in small groups so that teachers can focus on student needs. The use of interns from local colleges and the inclusion of special needs children in regular reading instruction reduce class size. Smaller class size, professional development, and school planning support flexibility and continuous improvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Smith School (K–5)

- ◆ Over five years, a 24% increase in the number of students reaching the state's reading goal
- ◆ Over five years, a 45% increase in the number of students reaching the state's writing goal
- ◆ Teachers use a child's current instructional level in reading to guide instruction and to provide reading materials.
- ◆ Students use rubrics to develop their writing abilities.
- ◆ Teachers keep running records during reading instruction to guide ongoing instruction.

Smith School's on-going development of curriculum is derived from the state's framework and aligns itself with state assessments. For writing, both teachers and their young students have learned to use rubrics. For reading everyone uses running records for reading instruction and students are administered the Developmental Reading Assessment. Teachers pace difficulty and challenge using the child's current instructional level. A student returns to his/her third teacher for grade four and an important year for statewide testing. Through looping, no time is lost identifying skill sets that need bolstering.

Research Summary

In Connecticut, a common practice of the most improved districts is the on-going assessment of students' reading proficiency through "running records." The teacher records the child's errors and uses them to note patterns of errors that indicate skill needs and to determine the level of books that the child can read independently. The running records are also used to track a child's progress, to form flexible groups and to individualize instruction. Districts also make use of special analyses of CMTs to determine students' needs for specific skill instruction (Baron, 1999, pp. 41 and 53).

Schools in the Massachusetts study (RMC Research, 1998) used data on student work to inform instruction in various ways. In some cases, groups of teachers examined student work to understand why some students made gains in reading while others did not. They identified needs for materials and additional books. Others created personalized plans, monitoring progress and providing additional services to increase a student's likelihood of success. Frequent assessments using running records were part of a repeated cycle of a continuous improvement pattern that one school used (p. 9).

Principal Studies:

Connecticut

Baron, J.B. (1999). Exploring high and improving reading achievement in Connecticut. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Massachusetts

RMC Research Corporation and the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University. (1998). Indicators of capacity for school reform project: Massachusetts literacy study. Report of phase I findings. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

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Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). Preventing reading difficulties in young children. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

- ◆ See Chapter 6 for monitoring of student performance to inform instruction language learners at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch6.html>
- ◆ See Chapter 8 for strategies to help children with reading difficulties in grades 1 to 3 at <http://stills.nap.edu/html/prdyc/ch8.html>

Taylor, B.M., Pearson, P.D., Clark, K.F., & Walpole, S. (2000). Beating the odds in teaching all children to read. (CIERA Report #2-006). Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, University of Michigan. See <http://www.ciera.org/ciera/publications/report-series/inquiry-2/2-006.pdf>

Related Web Resources

Children's Speech and Language Developmental Milestones (15)
Developmental Characteristics of Children: Birth – 11 years (6)

Students can attain high levels of literacy when there is quality leadership and a championing of literacy.

The Practices	
Vermont	◆ There is strong influence of an individual (administrator, librarian, teacher).
Maine	◆ Leadership is a key ingredient; it can come from different roles.
Connecticut/NEGP	◆ Strong ownership and accountability mechanisms in every school.

Questions to think about

- ◆ What is the role of the quality leader or champion of literacy?
- ◆ Without such a leader or literacy champion, what alternatives can a school staff turn to if they desire high levels of literacy?

Story Summaries

Arthur T. Talmadge Elementary School

The school represents distributive leadership: the principal meets and plans with teachers of reading and writing, and supports teachers in their instructional decisions. Teachers, in turn, put in extra hours and volunteer for additional activities, creating a strong professional community at the school. A schoolwide reading coordinator who tests all first graders and all new students for placements – and knows every teacher well – has organized the literacy program for more than a dozen years.

- ◆ The school offers several before school literacy programs to different groups of students at risk.
- ◆ After school activities, such as a scrabble club, are organized to strengthen students' skills.
- ◆ The school works to develop a print rich environment, where children see the connection of reading and writing everyday to their lives outside of school.
- ◆ Local high school students tutor and mentor students, primarily helping them with homework.
- ◆ Local community members and parents are invited to read aloud at regularly held special events.

Elwood School

- ◆ Small school in predominantly middle–class community
- ◆ Longtime, well–regarded principal considered "reading expert"
- ◆ Confidence about reading instruction grown out of continuing professional renewal
- ◆ Highly trained paraeducators supported with local funds
- ◆ Experts brought in to provide in–service training
- ◆ Collegial conversations, common readings and courses, and time to develop and plan

At the Elwood School (a pseudonym), teachers attribute considerable influence to longtime principal Lesley Jacobs. Although the wide range of specific instructional practices is highly visible, staff also share an underlying set of values and practices. In addition, school staff have recruited the resources to develop and sustain a highly trained group of paraeducators who both reduce class size and provide very good instruction. Teachers appear to have been supported in their eclectic approaches by building leadership that capitalized on the individual strengths of the faculty. There is a positive home–school connection, and school staff are perceived by the community as doing a good job. Extensive literacy training since the 1970s has helped to build school–wide momentum and excitement around professional renewal. These teachers already had an established sense of confidence about their teaching, but under Jacobs' leadership, they also reexamined their practices.

Mary Lyon School (K–8)

Principal Mary Nash, the creator and founder of the model for full inclusion at the Mary Lyon School, without a doubt sets the tone for high expectations and professional development at the school. By asking the difficult questions about how the school knows if it is doing a good enough job preparing children for their futures, Principal Nash enables teachers to question their practice continually. All Boston Public Schools have a coach for literacy, and the Lyon's coach is a former classroom teacher who knows the teachers, students and parents well. The principal and the coach share the facilitation of teacher discussions and study groups around literacy.

Lawrence School (Elementary)

- ◆ New principal has detailed knowledge of what every teacher does to develop literacy
- ◆ Substitutes hired to assure continuous professional development for teachers
- ◆ Print–rich environment in hallways and classes
- ◆ Print materials clearly organized by level and use
- ◆ 64% met state writing goals in 1998, compared to 19% in 1993
- ◆ Writing scores 6% higher than the average state scores
- ◆ 59% met state reading goals in 1998, compared to 44% in 1993
- ◆ Reading scores 5% higher than the average state scores

Mark Proffitt, the principal for the last six years, has tirelessly built staff camaraderie, data–driven classroom practices, resources that support high quality instruction, and constant communication with Lawrence School families.

In 1987, the state of Connecticut adopted a set of standards, The Common Core of Learning. Each district develops curricula that are both aligned with the state standards and based on a curriculum framework developed by the state five years ago. It has scaffolded standards by adopting statewide Developmental Reading Assessments, by providing alternative forms of Connecticut Mastery Tests, and by requiring that schools write action plans in response to their test results.

Research Summary

The Vermont Reading Project (Lipson, Mekkelsen, Mosenthal, Russ, &Sortino, 2000), a partnership of the Northeast Regional Educational Laboratory, the Vermont State Department of Education, and the University of Vermont, looked for schools in which at least 80% of the students at grade 2 and grade 4 performed at or above the standard on the VT Developmental Reading Assessment (administered at 2nd grade) and the New Standards Reference Exam, Reading Subtests (administered at 4th grade) during the Spring of 1998. In the high performing schools, they found longterm stable literacy leadership, whether a principal, librarian, or teacher (p.1).

Baron's study (1999) of Connecticut schools found collective leadership. "What characterizes the majority of the districts with the greatest improvement in reading scores was the collective ownership of reading instruction as a district priority. Local school boards, superintendent of schools, principals, classroom teachers, and specialists knew what they were trying to accomplish and helped one another to achieve that end" (p. 41).

Principal Studies:

Connecticut

Baron, J. B. (1999). Exploring high and improving reading achievement in Connecticut. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Vermont

Lipson, M. Y., Mekkelsen, J., Mosenthal, J. H., Russ, B., &Sortino, S. (2000). Contexts and practices of successful schools within a standards-based environment. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

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U. S. Department of Education. (1996). The role of leadership in sustaining school reform: Voices from the Field. Washington, D.C., Author. See <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Leadership/>

Related Web Resources

Simple Things You Can Do To Help All Children Read Well and Independently by the End of the Third Grade (32)

Students can attain high levels of literacy when school staff work together toward a shared vision and have genuine respect for each other.

The Practices	
RMC/Massachussets	◆ School staff members have created effective ways to work together and support each other; principals demonstrate their appreciation for the experience and dedication of staff and support them in many ways.
Vermont	◆ Everybody appears to be working together toward a shared vision, or there is a focused staff with a common goal. There is a genuine respect for each other.
Maine	◆ School staff work together to find solutions.

Questions to think about

- ◆ What are the shared values and behaviors of individual staff members that help to promote genuine respect and common vision?
- ◆ What role can the school principal play in promoting shared vision and mutual respect?

Story Summaries

South Creek School

- ◆ Basal series adopted for uniformity in approach and material
- ◆ Program carried out within the framework of daily language arts block
- ◆ Flexibility with basal use and supplements
- ◆ Individual needs addressed within basal framework
- ◆ Growth of faculty consensus building, shared vision, and respect

Varied philosophies at South Creek School (a pseudonym) have been consolidated into a new vision of literacy instruction anchored by a basal program. Teachers here admit to past inclinations toward "Whole Language" versus "phonics," yet they can see how working together and articulating a shared vision have led to the success of the students on the statewide literacy assessments. The basal program acts as a foundation for the common curriculum as each individual classroom teacher — with the support of the early literacy specialist and enrichment and remedial opportunities — implements it according to his or her own style and knowledge about a particular class. The relationships and understanding that have developed out of the professional interactions amongst teachers and administrators have led South Creek down a path of consensus building, shared vision, and respect.

"Carlisle" Elementary School

- ◆ Teachers proposed a new model of instructional practice
- ◆ Daily teacher collaboration during lunch hour
- ◆ Principal's support in teachers' innovation
- ◆ High library collaboration that makes sure the library holds books for the broad range of students' needs
- ◆ 80% of 2nd–graders meet the state standard for reading

One energetic and inspiring colleague, Debbie, was trained as a Reading Recovery teacher during the 1991–93 time frame. The Reading Recovery teacher's training strongly influences the practice the primary teachers implement. More subtly, it also guides the direction for teachers at grades 3–4. The faculty recognize that these approaches have allowed them to "know the knower" — that is, to teach responsively to individual children. In addition, they argue that this approach has influenced student performance because of the consistent instruction that has resulted. They believe it's critical that the children are using the same strategies, same terms, and same language throughout their primary grade experience.

Mary Lyon School (K–8)

Teachers at the Mary Lyon School share ideas and discuss what works best with their students. Groups of grade level teachers form teams to study student work and teachers' assignments together, teachers meet across grades to discuss and pilot lessons. Grade level groups of teachers meet with the principal every other week to review student work and discuss student performance. Teams of teachers analyze teacher assignments together, purposefully building collegial learning communities within the school. A school literacy coach works with teachers individually and in study groups to develop the school's vision for literacy teaching. Teachers have common planning time to facilitate interaction and communication.

Arthur T. Talmadge Elementary School

The staff has consistently chosen an approach to reading which they describe as traditional, relying on a basal reader and supplementing it with other materials. All classes use one of two basal series for the basis of the literacy program, and follow a grade level genre theme such as fables or biographies. Teachers have common planning time for working together, meet weekly, communicate frequently with each other during the day, and freely share materials. A reading coordinator organizes the literacy program. Over time, the principal has hired teachers who share a teaching philosophy and work ethic around the importance of literacy.

Research Summary

The Vermont Reading Project (Lipson, Mekkelsen, Mosenthal, Russ, & Sortino, 2000), a partnership of the Northeast Regional Educational Laboratory, the Vermont State Department of Education, and the University of Vermont, looked for schools in which at least 80% of the students at grade 2 and grade 4 performed at or above the standard on the VT Developmental Reading Assessment (administered at 2nd grade) and the New Standards Reference Exam, Reading Subtests (administered at 4th grade) during the Spring of 1998. In the high performing schools, they found a focused school community working toward a shared vision, with genuine respect and open and ongoing communication among the staff (p.1).

Joan Baron's study (1999) of Connecticut's reading practices found that "What characterizes the majority of the districts with the greatest improvement in reading scores was the collective ownership of reading instruction as a district priority. Local school boards, superintendent of schools, principals, classroom teachers, and specialists knew what they were trying to accomplish and helped one another to achieve that end" (p. 41).

"In lieu of a single ideological approach, eclecticism and pragmatism best characterize the instructional practices and reading materials being used in the ten most improved Connecticut districts. Every district spoke of the 'balance' it aimed to achieve between teaching students skills to decode new words and deriving understanding from engaging literature and nonfiction texts. In several of these districts, there seemed to be a genuine commitment to a dual focus on early listening comprehension and explicit phonemic awareness and decoding skills. They also described the balance between reading and writing. In the most improved school districts, classroom teachers, reading specialists, speech and language pathologist, and special education teachers with different beliefs and training all share the same copy machines and teachers' lounges and discuss what works best with their students" (Baron, 1999, pp. 41–42).

In the twelve schools that RMC and the LAB studied (1998), staff value communication among each other about how their students are learning and about effective instructional practices. The structures common to these settings were common planning time for groups of teachers, team teaching, and collaborative decision-making processes. Principals shape the climate by encouraging pilot efforts around new techniques, by participating in the collaboration over student work and progress, and by seeking supportive resources (p. 12).

Principal Studies:

Connecticut

Baron, J. B. (1999). Exploring high and improving reading achievement in Connecticut. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Massachusetts

RMC Research Corporation and the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University. (1998). Indicators of capacity for school reform project: Massachusetts literacy study. Report of phase I findings. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

Vermont

Lipson, M. Y., Mekkelsen, J., Mosenthal, J. H., Russ, B., & Sortino, S. (2000). Contexts and practices of successful schools within a standards-based environment. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

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Fisher, C., & Adler, M.A. (1999, December). Early reading in high-poverty schools: Emerald Elementary beats the odds. (CIERA Report #3-009). Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, University of Michigan. See <http://www.ciera.org/ciera/publications/report-series/inquiry-3/3-009.pdf>

Louis, K.S., Marks, H.M., Kruse, S. (1996). Teachers' professional community in restructuring schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 33, 757–798.

Miles, K. & Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). Rethinking the allocation of teaching resources: Some lessons from high-performing schools. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

Peterson, P.L., McCarthy, S.J., & Elmore, R.F. (1996). Learning from school restructuring. *American Educational Research Journal*, 33, 119–153.

Shields, P., Knapp, M., & Wechsler, M. (1995). Improving schools from the bottom up: From effective schools to restructuring. Summary volume. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Education.

Related Web Resources

Tools for Schools: School Reform Models Supported by the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students (33)

Students can demonstrate high levels of literacy when attention is given to tests and test taking.

The Practices	
RMC/Massachusetts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Test preparation, practice testing, and test-taking skills instruction for students are taken seriously at these schools
Connecticut/NEGP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Specific materials have been developed to prepare for test-taking; public reporting of test results

Questions to think about

- ◇ What are strategies that practitioners can use that will not result in "teaching to the test"?
- ◇ What kinds of support could the state department of education and district provide to facilitate their attention to testing abilities?

Story Summaries

Beeman Elementary School

- ◇ At least 80% of 2nd-graders perform at the state reading standard
- ◇ Five years ago the school had the highest per student expenditure and the lowest performance
- ◇ Implemented state assessment
- ◇ Result evaluation
- ◇ Small class-size

Baxter School's success with student achievement in reading and writing has come recently. Former principal Janet Showers says that, although the school and its faculty had enjoyed an "image as an incredible school, its test scores were not good."

A new superintendent and school principal asked questions about the alignment of tests and curriculum and about how to help students achieve. According to Showers, this administrative-level attention to the "glaringly" weak reading scores...signaled a shift in attention.

When the district superintendent was asked why Baxter School was so successful in 1997–1998, he named three factors. One of them was the use of student assessment results.

Research Summary

Joan Boykoff Baron's study (1999) for the National Education Goals Panel identifies the Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMTs) as a "major factor" in helping most improved districts in Connecticut to focus their instruction. They used the tests to realign their curriculum and instructional practices and felt they had an agreed-upon set of skills. Baron also notes the stability of the tests since 1985, with useful periodic refinements. The State Department of Education responded to districts' requests for disaggregated test data, for item analyses, for estimated national norms, for comparable formats to use in grades 3,5, and 7, and for copies of their students' short-answer and essay responses to test items (pp. 22–23).

Although there are mixed reviews about the utility of the publication of test results in local newspapers, a number of administrators mention that the practice of publishing strategic school profiles has had a strong impact on their instruction and student achievement, motivating changes in their instruction in reading. By state law, Connecticut identifies the State's 14 most needy school and their designation as Priority School Districts (PSD) by the provision of additional resources through a series of categorical grants. The gap between the poorest districts and the rest of the state on the CMTs is beginning to close (Baron, 1999, p. 27).

In the RMC/LAB study (1998) of high-poverty urban Massachusetts schools that scored significantly higher than other schools in their districts, teachers, parents and students gave special attention to test-taking skills and testing days, using strategies that range from the use of practice materials to providing special snacks. School staffs use analyses of test items to understand instructional needs.

Vermont's study (Lipson, Mekkelsen, Mosenthal, Russ, & Sortino, 2000) found that successful schools used common assessments. The assessments contributed to the coherence of a school's literacy effort. In schools where approaches were "eclectic," common assessments prevented them from giving way to fragmented or inconsistent practices and encouraged teachers to collaborate.

Principal Studies:

Connecticut

Baron, J.B. (1999). Exploring high and improving reading achievement in Connecticut. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel.

Massachusetts

RMC Research Corporation and the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University. (1998). Indicators of capacity for school reform project: Massachusetts literacy study. Report of phase I findings. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

Vermont

Lipson, M. Y., Mekkelsen, J., Mosenthal, J. H., Russ, B., &Sortino, S. (2000). Contexts and practices of successful schools within a standards–based environment. Providence, RI: The Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University.

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Mehrens, W.A. (1989, December). **Preparing students to take standardized achievement tests**. Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Test Measurement and Evaluation, American Institutes for Research. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 314 427) Available at: http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed314427.html

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Related Web Resources

The Early Literacy Advisor: Standards and Benchmarks in Early Literacy (21)

Stories

This section presents Knowledge Loom stories about classrooms, schools, or districts that exemplify one or more of the practices in the spotlight.

Each story contains a full feature article and a set of facts about how the practice was put into action. Each story lists the practices it exemplifies and the name of the content provider.

For an overview of additional content presented on The Knowledge Loom Web site that may not have been selected for this print document, see the Spotlight Map located earlier in the document.

Smith School (K–5)

Smith School (K–5)

New Britain, CT

School Type: Public

School Setting: Urban

Level: Elementary

School

Design: Traditional

Content Presented By:

The Education Alliance at Brown
University



It is August 2000, before the school year has officially begun at Smith School in New Britain, Connecticut. A group of staff members and the school principal have gathered around a small table. Still celebratory over their recent recognition as a Title I Distinguished School, they are having an animated discussion about the key to their school's strong progress in literacy.

Since the fall of 1993, the percentage of Smith students meeting the state goal in reading has almost tripled and has exceeded its own district by four percentage points. Progress in writing has been even more dramatic, from 13% meeting the state goal in 1993 to 53% meeting the goal in fall 1999, far exceeding the district.

One staff member comments that the key to their success has been a unified belief that all children can succeed. At Smith, it is important that educators concentrate on including all students and teachers of bilingual programs.

After a brief pause for a moment, another staff member adds that their progress may be attributed to the ways they have learned to use student data to make instruction increasingly based on student needs.

Principal Diane Dugas, who has been at this school for two years, points out that Smith School's model shows three intersecting circles, "Home, School, and Community." At the intersection of all three circles is "Success."

For more than five years, Smith School has steadily integrated a state standards initiative and a strong, award-winning Title I program to develop systemic school change.

Smith's ongoing curriculum development is derived from the state's framework and aligns with state assessments. For writing, both teachers and their students have learned to use rubrics. For reading, teachers use running records for reading instruction and administer the Developmental Reading Assessment.

Teachers keep a keen eye on each student's progress and pace difficulty and challenge to the instructional level. A student returns to his or her third-grade teacher for grade 4, an important year for statewide testing. By using this approach (looping), no time is lost identifying skill sets that need bolstering. Across the grades, block scheduling assures time for intense, uninterrupted time on task.

Title I funds support after-school programs in which students have extra time for literacy development.

It is clear that Smith School has also benefited greatly from Reading Recovery, an early intervention program for struggling readers. Teachers have used the strategies of Reading Recovery as a basis for a common language that articulates students' progress and instructional process among staff members and across grades. Another practice is to explicitly connect the processes of reading and writing early on, thereby demonstrating the power of literacy for communication and motivating the beginner to learn.

Smith School has a strong "glue" that sustains a necessarily complex program for children with serious needs. The coherence comes from many assets: their unified vision of literacy, values centered on equity and excellence, highly qualified and stable leadership and teachers, a collaborative and respectful quality of teacher interaction that allows for different teaching styles, ongoing professional development focused on student needs and standards, and data-driven teaching and learning.

Outside of Smith's walls, external forces support its internal coherence: primarily the educational leadership of a superintendent with a background in reading and instruction and the state-level leadership whose standards movement has transformed a profession.

Demographics

New Britain is a member of Connecticut's Education Reference Group (ERG) I, one of nine groups of districts with similar socioeconomic status and needs, ERGs A through I. ERGs are determined statistically by income, occupation, and educational levels, and by the percentage of children in single-parent families and in families receiving aid for dependent children. ERG I, which contains the state's three largest cities, Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport, has the lowest income, occupation, and educational levels, and the highest percentage of children in single-parent families and families receiving aid for dependent children (AFDC). New Britain's median family income in 1996 was \$24,349.

The Smith School, built in 1952 and last renovated in 1992, houses 654 students, grades K–5, in 30 permanent classrooms. Traditional in construction, the building is located at the top of a hill on a residential street in New Britain, Connecticut.

According to the 1999–2000 Smith School Strategic School Profile, which reflects the time period of this school's transformation, 58% of Smith's enrollment consisted of students with non-English home language and 61% of students were eligible for free or reduced-priced meals. Between 1993 and 1999, the percentage of Smith students meeting the state goal in reading almost tripled, exceeding its own district by four percentage points. Progress in writing was even more dramatic, from 13% meeting the state goal in 1993 to 53% meeting the goal in fall 1999, far exceeding the district and one percentage point less than the state's 1999 percentage.

Student Racial/Ethnic Composition (1999–2000):

- .3% American Indian
- 1.8 % Asian American
- 21.9% Black
- 46.8% Hispanic
- 29.2% White

Limited English Proficient (1999–2000):

14% Bilingual education and English as a second language services

58% Students with non-English home language

Students Qualifying for Free or Reduced Priced Lunch: 61%

Students Receiving Special Education Services: 11%

Background

In 1993, under the leadership of its principal, staff members began to enrich instruction—to personalize instruction and engage students through their interests. An additional impetus for improvement was the state-mandated standards. In May of 2000, Smith School was recognized as a Distinguished Title I School.

The staff at Smith School used results-based instruction successfully and instituted the use of assessment tools developed for the classroom. The Reading Recovery Program for at-risk early learners and the SAIL and SOAR programs for the second graders have served as the basis for other initiatives. Smith's after-school programs and a mentoring program support student progress. Smith has ongoing partnerships with Central Connecticut State University and local businesses.

Design & Implementation

Smith School has made progress by focusing instruction based on student performance. Staff analyze results of standardized tests and classroom assessments. Teachers work in teams to discuss student progress and use the information to group children for specific instruction.

Instructional reforms were supported by recent curriculum changes in language arts and mathematics. Each of the key curriculum upgrades has assessment tools built in to help staff focus on student performance.

Time spent on literacy has been increasingly intensified and expanded through after-school programs, full-day kindergarten, and class-size reduction. A student returns to his or her third-grade teacher for grade 4. By using this approach (looping), no time is lost identifying skill sets requiring extra attention before taking state mastery tests.

Results

Smith Elementary School's fourth-grade students have experienced steadily increasing achievement over the years as measured by the Connecticut Mastery Tests. Between 1993 and 1998, the percentage of students reaching the state goal for reading increased by 24 percentage points, and the increase in writing was 45 percentage points.

Students have demonstrated similar progress in the third and fifth grades on standardized tests given in the fall of each year in reading, mathematics, and writing. All test areas show improvement in the percentage of students reaching the district goal standards and a reduction in the percentage of students who score below the standards.

Replication Details

The key elements of Smith School's literacy program are the following:

- Strategic planning
- Professional development: weekly by teams, monthly across grade levels, and during summer institutes and workshops
- Team planning time including bilingual teacher as team member
- Curriculum development using state framework
- Looping grades 3 and 4
- Literacy block scheduling (90 minutes)
- Full-day kindergarten for bilingual students
- Class size reduction
- Reading Recovery and SAIL/SOAR tutoring programs for grade 2
- Gifted/talented programs
- Bilingual classes: Early Literacy Para in K, ESOL Para
- Title I (Project Arise, Reading and Math resources)
- Goals 2000
- After-school literacy programs
- Home Literacy Connections program
- Summer school and the Governor's Summer Reading Program
- PTA support
- Parent volunteer organizer
- Parent workshops
- Home visits
- Local business and non-profit partnerships
- Public library partnership
- Partnerships with institutions of higher education

Costs and Funding

Smith school has received of Priority School Grant, Early Reading Success Grant, and Title I funding. Average expenditures per pupil in New Britain are \$9,115, reflecting local, state, and federal revenue sources. (For more detail, see <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/datacentral>.)

Contact Information

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Rating Criteria

The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) undertook a study of Connecticut Schools primarily to analyze the local and statewide policies that have contributed to Connecticut's designation as the nation's most successful public school system, as judged by the reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam.

The author of the case study selected 10 medium and large school districts in the state that made the most improvement in reading achievement. Local districts were selected based on their fourth-, sixth-, and eighth-grade performance on the reading section of the Connecticut Mastery Test. Districts with greater than 100 students per grade level and whose average reading score improved by at least 10 index points from 1993 to 1998 were included.

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Students can attain high levels of literacy when teachers believe that all students can succeed and when instruction is guided by student needs for literacy instruction.

Students can attain high levels of literacy when time is dedicated to literacy instruction and to exposure to literacy.

Students can attain high levels of literacy when the school staff actively and frequently uses student data to inform and improve instruction.

Lawrence School (Elementary)

Lawrence School (Elementary)

Middletown, CT

School Type: Public

School Setting: Urban

Level: Elementary

School

Design: Traditional

Content Presented By:

The Education Alliance at Brown
University



On a tour through the well-kept grounds and buildings of Lawrence School in Middletown, Connecticut, you would notice two hallmarks of a high-quality literacy program.

The first is the way that this elementary school uses space. In the classrooms, it seems as if every student has been considered, making each square foot of space conducive to attaining instructional goals. Students work in small, flexible learning environments that are tailored to developmental and literacy levels. The space optimizes potential uses of technology, with Internet access available in 69% of classrooms. In addition, the school integrates special education needs, with major renovation creating facilities for the district's special education program.

The second is the print-rich environment. Throughout the grades, abundant print materials are posted and clearly organized by level and use, reflecting a clarity and purpose communicated between teachers and learners. Principal Mark Proffitt commented on the importance of having ample materials but added quickly that it is instruction, not quantity of materials, which actually raises performance.

The principal's role as educational leader and literacy champion is key to Lawrence's success. Principal since 1993, Proffitt has a detailed knowledge of what each teacher does to develop successful literacy. He has used this knowledge to build staff camaraderie, improve classroom practices, and attain resources that support high-quality instruction.

The transformation from a low-performing to high-performing school was not easy and occurred gradually over about five years. Middletown is among the state's three neediest districts, based on percentages of students eligible for free lunch programs and students' Connecticut Mastery Test scores. Lawrence is a Title I school, and its 1999-2000 Strategic School Profile indicated that 39.3% of students were eligible for free or reduced-priced meals. Its most significant educational challenge was the high mobility rate of its students. While approximately 85% of students in Middletown and in Connecticut returned to the same school after attending the previous year, only 76% returned to Lawrence.

In 1993, Lawrence School's state mastery test results reflected the performance of lower socio-economic levels of the state. In reading, 44% of fourth graders met the state standard. In writing, only 19% met the state standard. Five years later, without significant shifts in demographics, 59% percent met the standard in reading and 64% met the standard in writing. In 2002-3, these

results remain strong, at 51% and 62%, respectively. These facts not only reflect Lawrence School's dramatic transformation but also suggest that the demographic fatalism of many other poor American communities might be reversed.

Important state and federal resources have supported priority communities and schools like Lawrence. The school staff writes a yearly action plan in response to their state assessment results. The principal and teachers pay attention to student data and assessment, for example, using daily running records of student reading, which help to align instruction with the state-mandated administration of the Developmental Reading Assessment.

In addition, parents volunteer their time and maintain a strong partnership with the school—despite the high ratio of single-parent families and families in which both parents work. To sustain parent involvement, the school employs a family outreach worker. In addition, the staff enthusiastically includes families in developing a school improvement plan that touches all aspects of instruction and school life. An active Home-School Association/PTA provides volunteer and financial support. Showing administrative support, the principal writes a bi-weekly newsletter with literacy tips for parents. The fruits of these efforts are seen in how kindergarteners and first graders take home books nightly to read with a parent or caregiver.

As with numerous other Connecticut schools, Lawrence has benefited greatly from Reading Recovery, an early intervention program for struggling beginning readers. Students using Reading Recovery spend extra time on their letter-sound associations and word recognition strategies. In addition, the Reading Recovery teachers have shared these strategies with other teachers across all grades. This serves as a communication tool for teachers to articulate students' progress and their instructional process. Teachers also keep daily running records, allowing them to apply phonics elements systematically and according to specific student needs.

During the school's professional development activities, teachers collaborate to develop curriculum in response to student achievement data and to the state's frameworks and assessment results. Hiring a cadre of substitutes for the school year helps to assure continuity of instruction during professional development time.

In the 2003–04 school year, "professional development activities will continue to support a three-block schedule to emphasize reading, writing, and word study in all curriculum areas, through a coordinated, focused instructional framework." Furthermore, the framework will emphasize "ongoing and sustained assessment of student learning through observation, scoring rubrics, and review of student work," and it will integrate technology "to support student achievement in all curriculum areas" (Strategic School Profile 2002–03). As a result of the school's approach to professional development, teachers share a common language about literacy that fosters a love of reading and writing throughout the school.

Demographics

Lawrence School in Middletown, Connecticut is a Title I school. Middletown is a member of Connecticut's Education Reference Group (ERG) H, the eighth of nine groups, ERGs A through I. ERGs are districts with similar socioeconomic status and needs, determined statistically by income, occupation, and educational levels, and by the percentage of children in single-parent families and in families receiving aid for dependent children. Middletown is among the state's three neediest districts based on percentages of students eligible for free lunch programs and students' Connecticut Mastery Test scores.

According to the 1999–2000 Strategic School Profile, which reflects the demographics during the time period of this school's transformation, 39.3% of students were eligible for free or reduced–priced meals. Its most significant educational challenge is the high mobility rate of its students. While approximately 85% of students in Middletown and in Connecticut return to the same school after attending the previous year, only 76% return to Lawrence. There has been little change in school need according to the 2002–03 Strategic School Profile: 33.4% of students were eligible for free or reduced–priced meals.

Between 1993 and 1998,, the percentage of Lawrence students meeting the state goal in reading rose from 44% to 59%, exceeding its own district and the state by five percentage points. Progress in writing is even more dramatic, from 19% meeting the state goal in 1993 to 64% meeting the goal in 1998, exceeding the district by four percentage points and the state by six percentage points.

The school spreads out over attractive, well–kept grounds. Built in 1972 for open–space instruction, its renovation has emphasized spaces for flexible small–group instruction.

Student Racial/Ethnic Composition 1999–2000:

5.2% Asian American
29.5% Black
7.4% Hispanic
57.9% White

Limited English Proficient 1999–2000:

7.2% of students with non–English home language
2.9% of students receiving bilingual education and English as a second language services

Students Qualifying for Free or Reduced Priced Lunch: 39%

Students Receiving Special Education Services: 18.6% (including students from other schools)

Background

In 1993, Lawrence School's state mastery test results reflected the performance of lower socio–economic levels of the state. In reading, 44% of fourth graders met the state standard. In writing, only 19% met the state standard. Five years later, without significant shifts in demographics, 59% percent met the standard in reading and 64% met the standard in writing.

Design & Implementation

During the five–year period of 1993 to 1998, at least two significant changes occurred. Lawrence hired a new principal, Mark Proffitt, and the state implemented mandatory standards.

Lawrence is structured for student–centered teaching and learning, both organizationally and physically. An example is how early intervention (in grade 1) with Reading Recovery has consistent follow up in the classroom and in subsequent grades. Careful space planning has created small, flexible, and developmentally appropriate literacy learning environments. Throughout the school, print materials are clearly organized by level and use. An important scaffolding for this focus is ongoing professional development on curriculum development and on using various forms of student data to guide instruction.

In their strategic plans, the school staff have focused especially on school-family connections to build strong early literacy and instruction that aligns with standards and learners' needs. Parents are serious partners in learning to read and write. They volunteer at school, read with their children at home, and participate in activities and in decision making about school matters. They receive a constant flow of information, especially through the principal's bi-weekly newsletter.

Results

In 1993, Lawrence School's state mastery test results reflected the performance of lower socio-economic levels of the state. In reading, 44% of fourth graders met the state standard. In writing, only 19% met the state standard. Five years later, without significant shifts in demographics, 59% percent met the standard in reading and 64% met the standard in writing.

Replication Details

The critical elements of Lawrence School's literacy program are:

- Strategic planning
- Team planning by grade level
- Professional development: scheduled weekly by teams or across grade levels; scheduled monthly by grade levels; individual workshops
- Cadre of substitutes to cover professional development time during the school year
- Professional development includes curriculum development using state framework
- Use of state's alternate forms of Connecticut Mastery Test
- Use of running records and implementation of Directed Reading Assessment
- School Family Literacy Coordinator
- Reading Recovery
- Title I
- Principal's bi-weekly newsletter
- Bag-a-Book program in K-1
- PTA support
- Parent volunteers
- Parent Resource Coordinator (district-level resource)
- Parent workshops in literacy
- Family Outreach Worker

Costs and Funding

Average expenditures per pupil in Middletown were \$9,795 in 2000, reflecting local, state, and federal revenue sources, including Title I funding. (For more details, see <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/der/index.htm>.)

Contact Information

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Rating Criteria

The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) undertook a study of Connecticut Schools primarily to analyze the local and statewide policies that have contributed to Connecticut's designation as the nation's most successful public school system, as judged by the reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam.

The author of the case study selected 10 medium and large school districts in the state that made the most improvement in reading achievement. Local districts were selected based on their fourth-, sixth-, and eighth-grade performance on the reading section of the Connecticut Mastery Test. Districts with greater than 100 students per grade level, and whose average reading score improved by at least 10 index points from 1993 to 1998 were included.

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Students can attain high levels of literacy when teachers believe that all students can succeed and when instruction is guided by student needs for literacy instruction.

Beeman Elementary School

Beeman Elementary School

New Haven, VT

School Type: Public

School Setting: Suburban

Level: Elementary

School Design: Traditional

Content Presented By:

University of Vermont



Books are everywhere at Beeman Elementary School in New Haven, Vermont. While teachers have always had a deep commitment to books and to reading, the school's success with student achievement in reading and writing has come only recently.

Former principal Janet Showers says that although the school and its faculty had enjoyed an "image as an incredible school, test scores were not good." Until the late 1980s, she adds, there was a perception that "test scores didn't mean anything."

What happened to transform both the perceptions and the scores? During the late 1980s, there were several changes in the district. A new superintendent, Joe Leonard, took the helm and was joined shortly thereafter by Showers as the new principal. The two began to ask questions about the alignment of tests and curriculum and how to help students achieve. They were also asking difficult questions about teacher responsibility for all students, including those receiving services from special education and Title 1.

According to Showers, the administration's level of attention, the "glaringly" weak reading scores, and an ensuing battle among primary faculty about "whole language" versus "phonics" made this a very challenging time, but it also signaled a shift in focus.

When the superintendent was asked why Beeman School was so successful in 1997–1998, he named three factors:

1. improved communication among teachers across grade levels;
2. use of student assessment results; and
3. small class size (maintained through the use of para-educators).

While teachers had taken professional development courses and were very active professionally, they had not identified "any needs as a group," according to Showers. Now, for the first time, they began to do coursework together — attending school- and district-sponsored classes, workshops, and summer institutes.

"I think we've gotten more training over the last four to five years; some of which has been very, very strongly research-based, and I think that we're trying to put them into practice in the classroom," says one teacher. "We have a lot of support for trying new things, which is wonderful."

One approach that Beeman teachers learned about through coursework was DEAR (Drop Everything

and Read). This sustained silent reading time provides extensive opportunities for students to read in class. Beeman's administrators also brought the university to the district in the form of contract courses and SDIs (School Development Institutes) to ask questions about current practices.

When the school restructured and created block scheduling for literacy, they also brought para-educators, called "collaborative partners" into that time period. The idea was to "push in" the services needed to teach reading and writing, and this block was to be "inviolable" -- no announcements, no interruptions of any sort, no management or non-literacy activities such as work sheets or other time-consuming projects. During literacy time, students are reading and writing: They read books, discuss books, write about books, do word work, write in journals, and author original pieces.

Asked about their methods, Beeman teachers describe their instructional approach as eclectic yet consistent. Says one teacher of a combination grade 3-4 classroom: "Reading has a lot of different faces, and it happens several different times throughout every day of the week. So I would say there isn't just one way I teach reading."

Consistent with this view, the school does not rely on commercial programs or basal readers. Teachers draw from a wide variety of materials including Storybox and other little books, "Step" books, and trade books. They use methodologies such as individualized, self-selected reading; guided reading; word walls; and phonological awareness training.

The practices of third and fourth grade teachers converge slightly more than those of the first and second grade teachers. Grade 3-4 teachers use a literature-based discussion approach as their primary method. Students read either self-selected trade books or assigned group novels and meet to discuss their readings. Generally, there is a provision for responding to the literature. Some teachers have highly developed packets to accompany the reading, while others use response journals with articulated criteria.

In addition, teachers spend a great deal of time doing shared professional reading, which has provided a common basis for assessment. Beeman has systematized assessment and record keeping, with specified intervals for using certain common assessment tools. Using assessment in this way has allowed a strong and diverse faculty to create a reasonable amount of curricular coherence while maintaining the treasured autonomy of the teachers. As a result, they have had time to talk to each other and to understand and develop points of commonality.

The strong community of teachers is nurtured by the leadership of the school's current principal, Sheila Smith. As one teacher explained, the principal has emphasized "that it's a team effort, that we need to work together to develop some consistency from grade to grade and class to class. She is the one, last year, who made us realize that it doesn't matter how each of us teach individually, it's that we're working towards the same goals and that we're focusing on the curriculum and we're focusing on helping kids."

Demographics

Like many other small towns in Vermont, New Haven's activity centers on a village green, several small stores, the town hall, and the schools. Unlike some other communities, however, New Haven has a diverse population of largely middle-class residents. In New Haven, about 30% of the adults have a high school diploma, 20% have a college degree, and fewer than 10% have any graduate or professional degrees. The poverty rate is 12.7%, and 21% of students receive free and reduced lunch.

Although larger than Vermont's rural schools, Beeman Elementary is a small school with a population of 167 students, grades K–6. Classrooms are organized into one kindergarten classroom, three grade 1–2 multi-age classrooms, and three grade 3–4 multi-age classrooms.

Beeman's faculty is experienced and well-educated. Most teachers have a master's degree, several of which are in reading and language arts. Most veteran teachers received their master's degree more than a decade ago, although many have completed additional coursework since then.

Background

The present superintendent reflects on the considerable change over the past decade at Beeman Elementary School: "They have historically...had the highest per pupil cost in the district. At that point they were also the lowest performing school of the elementary schools in our district. That began to change within the last four years, when there really has been an emphasis on the academic performance."

The school's strong public image appears to have been related to the perceived excellence of the teachers. Beeman's teachers had a deep commitment to books and to reading. Some had been trained in individualized reading and the use of conferences.

When new leadership and standards called for change, Beeman steadily took steps to becoming a high-performing school. During the late 1980s, there were several changes in Beeman's district. A new superintendent, Joe Leonard, joined the district office, followed shortly thereafter by a new school principal, Janet Showers. They began to ask questions about the alignment of tests and curriculum and how to help students achieve. In addition, they were asking difficult questions about teacher responsibility for all students, including those receiving services from special education and Title 1.

According to Showers, the administration's level of attention, the "glaringly" weak reading scores, and an ensuing battle among primary faculty about "whole language" versus "phonics" made this a challenging time, but it also signaled a shift in focus. With professional development and school support, a strong community of teachers has helped improve student achievement and fostered the school's success.

Design & Implementation

Since the late 1980s, Beeman School has evolved into a high-performing school. Today teachers at Beeman share a common set of understandings and a sense of mission that unites them. They have been supported in their eclectic approaches by school-level leadership that has optimized the individual strengths of the faculty. Consistency and coherence were also promoted through focused and collaborative professional development and through a continuous evolution of assessment and record-keeping strategies.

Multiple instructional approaches

Beeman teachers do not employ one particular approach or method. They draw from a wide variety of materials, including Storybox and other little books, "Step" books, and trade books. The school does not rely on commercial programs. Teachers use methodologies such as individualized, self-selected reading; guided reading; word walls; and phonological awareness training.

The practices of grade 3–4 teachers converge slightly more. These teachers use a literature-based discussion approach as their primary method. Students read either self-selected trade books or

assigned group novels and meet to discuss their readings. Generally, there is some provision for responding to the literature. Some teachers have highly developed packets to accompany the reading, while others use response journals with articulated criteria.

Literacy block

During literacy time, the students are reading and writing. They read books, discuss books, write about books, do word work, write in journals, and author original pieces. The literacy block is not spent on management and non-literacy activities such as work sheets, artwork, or other time-consuming projects.

This has happened by design. When the school restructured and created block scheduling for literacy, they also brought para-educators, called "collaborative partners" into that time period. The idea was to "push in" the services needed to teach reading and writing, and this block was to be "inviolable"—no announcements, no interruptions of any sort. The block scheduling with collaborative partners has been in place for more than six years, and although there have been some changes due to budget cuts, it still functions largely as it was originally intended. Teachers credit this block scheduling and the highly skilled para-educators with having a major impact on student performance.

Professional development

Through professional development, teachers have done more coursework together—attending school- and district-sponsored classes, workshops, and summer institutes.

In the 1988–1989 school year, then principal Janet Showers brought into the school a yearlong course on reading. In recent years, the Beeman faculty has created a common reading list that they all discuss (e.g., Dick Allington's and Pat Cunningham's *Schools That Work*, and Cunningham's *Phonics They Use*). More recently, all of the primary faculty have taken a phonological development course. Teachers mention coursework taken with Lyman Hunt, an education professor at the University of Vermont who advocates sustained silent reading. Influenced by Lyman Hunt, Beeman relies heavily on DEAR (Drop Everything and Read).

With the other changes of the late 1980s, Beeman's school administrators brought the university to the district in the form of contract courses and SDIs (School Development Institutes). They asked questions about current practices. The district's current superintendent is also influential and is credited with giving the district its deliberate focus on curriculum.

Assessment

The extensive amount of shared professional reading has provided a common basis for assessment. Beeman has systematized assessment and record keeping, with specified intervals for using certain common assessment tools. Using assessment in this way has allowed a strong and diverse faculty to create a reasonable amount of curricular coherence while maintaining the treasured autonomy of the teachers. In addition, they have had time to talk to each other and to understand and develop points of commonality. The primary teachers, the grade 3–4 teachers, and the grade 5–6 teachers each spend one day a month off-site in team planning.

Results

At least 80% of Beeman's second and fourth graders performed at the state standard on the Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment and New Standards Reference Examination Reading Subtests administered in the spring of 1998.

Replication Details

Key elements of Beeman School's literacy program:

- Multiple instructional strategies
- Block scheduling for literacy
- Off-site opportunities for professional development
- Partnerships with institutions of higher education
- School-wide systematic assessments
- Full-time para-educators

Costs and Funding

Beeman is a Title I school, but would not be able to fund four full-time para-professionals with those funds. Instead, they fund a full-time Title I reading teacher and supplement the additional funds with local dollars. This commitment to the schools by the local school boards was also cited as one influence on student performance.

Contact Information

No contact information is available at this time.

Rating Criteria

In order to ensure the inclusion of an accurate representation of schools statewide, this study employed a two-tiered selection process.

First, all schools were sorted into three clusters based on school size, school diversity, community size, community socio-economic status, and "degree of 'rurality.'"

Schools were then sorted based on their second graders' performance on the Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment test and their fourth graders' performance on the basic understanding and analysis/interpretation portions of the New Standards Reference Examination, NSRE.

From within each cluster, two schools with at least 80% of their second and fourth graders performing at the state standard were selected.

This story exemplifies the following practices:

"Carlisle" Elementary School

"Carlisle" Elementary School

"Carlisle", VT

School Type: Public

School Setting: Rural

Level: Elementary

School Design: Traditional

Content Presented By:

University of Vermont



Upon driving into the village of Carlisle and close the elementary school, visitors to this Vermont community are greeted by an informing and welcoming sign :

"Children Are The Future"
 Cat in the Hat Party
 Staff and Students Read
 31,165 pages in 1 week
 (in recognition of Dr. Seuss's birthday)

The message is loud and clear: "We, as a community, value and prioritize our children and their literacy development."

It may come as a surprise to some that Carlisle, nestled in a remote village near one of the state's larger ski areas, is a poor community comprised mostly of poorly educated citizens. That is, 29% of the adults do not have a high school diploma, and about 14% have less than a 9th grade education. Just 34% of adults in the community have attained an education beyond the high school level, and a little more than half of the school's population (52%) qualifies for free and reduced lunch. There are few professionals in this town, and many people are employed seasonally by the nearby resort. However, the families do have strong links to the community and school.

What makes literacy work so well in this district? One overriding commitment is very clear. The staff and administration of Carlisle Elementary School are dedicated to exposing children to quality literature while giving **time** to the act of reading. Teachers at Carlisle devote approximately 90 minutes each day to literacy instruction, and the children read a great deal. Time is built in and prioritized for children to be engaged with books.

This has been an evolving process. Approximately 10 years ago, the teachers in Carlisle began to undertake real change. Now faculty and administrators point to two over-riding factors that have accounted for the success of their students' performance:

1. an individual, influential teacher and
2. the Reading Recovery program.

One energetic and inspiring colleague, Debbie, was trained as a Reading Recovery teacher during the 1991-93 time frame. She influenced her colleagues, modeled strategies, took her teammates along to conferences, and shared her enthusiasm for a methodology she believed really made a difference for

individual children. Her colleagues, in turn, took "Supportive Classroom" and "Guided Reading" courses. The Reading Recovery teacher's training strongly influences the practice the primary teachers implement. More subtly, it also guides the direction for teachers at grades 3–4.

The faculty recognize that these approaches have allowed them to "know the knower" — that is, to teach responsively to individual children. In addition, they argue that this approach has influenced student performance because of the consistent instruction that has resulted. They believe it's critical that the children are using the same strategies, same terms, and same language throughout their primary grade experience.

The size of the school and staff has definitely influenced how decisions are made regarding practice. The three primary grade teachers usually eat lunch together in one of their rooms, process the morning happenings, and focus on individual children and "how things are going." In 1996, an outcome of these ongoing, informal discussions led the teachers to propose a new model of instructional practice. They mutually agreed that they all had strengths and interests and that perhaps the children could benefit from them more specifically. The "smallness" of the group involved and the type of ongoing communication they had with their principal allowed for this type of change to be implemented. Debbie is now the reading specialist for K–2 and her classroom is devoted to ongoing and engaging literacy interactions; another teacher, Carol, teaches science/health and works with first- and second-graders each afternoon in guided reading groups. The third, Patricia, is the math and writing expert.

The two teachers who teach grades 3–4 also work extremely closely together and make decisions in a similar way. They continually evaluate and "tinker" with the systems and programs they have in place as part of a constant quest to make learning "work" for the children. They also remark on the principal's ongoing support "**to allow us to do what we need to do.**" It should be noted that Gerald, the principal, has been a part of the school and its journey since 1988–89. Debbie, the more influential faculty member, is grateful for this. "Teachers have set the initiative for what they want to learn in the building," she says, "and he has been very supportive of that."

Demographics

Carlisle School (a pseudonym) is a "country" or rural school nestled in a remote village nearby one of the state's larger ski areas. It is a small school with an enrollment of 110 students, grades K through 6, with three collaborative K–1–2 multi-age classrooms and two collaborative grades 3–4 multi-age classrooms.

Carlisle is a poor community and its citizens are poorly educated. Twenty-nine percent of the adults do not have a high school diploma (and about 14% of those have less than a 9th grade education). Thirty-four percent of Carlisle's community have attained an education beyond the high school level. Teachers' salaries, too, typify the socio-economic portrait: the average salary is \$28,707, whereas the average salary in the "uptown" cluster is \$41,476. There are few professionals in this community, and many people are employed seasonally by the nearby resort.

The families have strong links to the community and school. The community library is a part of the school's physical structure, thus the sense of the school as the hub of the community prevails.

Background

Over 10 years ago, the teachers in Carlisle began to undertake real change. Teachers and administrators point to two over-riding factors that account for the success of their students'

performance:

1. an individual, influential teacher and
2. Reading Recovery.

One energetic and inspiring colleague, Debbie, was trained as a Reading Recovery teacher during the 1991–93 time frame. She influenced her colleagues, modeled strategies, took her teammates along to conferences, and shared her enthusiasm for a methodology she believed really made a difference for individual children. Her colleagues, in turn, took "Supportive Classroom" and "Guided Reading" courses. The Reading Recovery teacher's training strongly influences the practice the primary teachers implement and more subtly guides the direction for teachers at grades 3–4.

The faculty recognize that these approaches have allowed them to teach responsively to individual children and to provide consistent instruction. They believe it's critical that the children are using the same strategies, same terms and same language throughout their primary grade experience.

At Carlisle, the smallness of the school and staff has influenced how decisions are made regarding practice. The staff of three primary grade teachers usually eats lunch together in one of their rooms, processes the morning happenings, focuses on individual children and "how things are going".

In 1996, the teachers mutually agreed that "they all had strengths and interests" and that perhaps the children could benefit from them. As a result, a reading specialist for grades K–2 and her classroom is devoted to ongoing and engaging literacy interactions, while two other colleagues teach science, health, math, and writing.

The third–fourth grade team of two also works closely together and makes decisions in a similar manner. These teachers continually evaluate and "tinker" with the systems and programs they have in place in their constant quest to make learning "work" for the children. Gerald, the principal since the 1988–89 school year, has provided invaluable support of teachers' ideas and initiative.

The staff and administration are dedicated to exposing children to quality literature and giving time to the act of reading. One way they've achieved this goal is through the America Reads program. In preparation of the 1998–99 school year senior citizen volunteers from the organization RSVP teamed up with America Reads and Debbie, the Reading Recovery teacher and K–2 reading teacher, for "extra" training.

Design & Implementation

The purposefulness, commitment, and management of instruction during literacy time is evident. In general, the teachers at Carlisle devote large amounts of time for literacy (approximately 90 minutes each day) and the children read a great deal. There are large quantities of books in the classrooms. What's even more impressive is the fact that time is built in and prioritized for children to be engaged with books.

K–1–2 teachers decided in 1996–97 to "teach to their strengths" and they now focus their individual attention to reading, math and science/health blocks in their respective rooms. The primary teachers have been strongly influenced by New Zealand models and have adopted a Guided Reading approach. Reading Recovery provides essential service to individual children and, also defines the types of classroom practice employed by the teachers. Phonological awareness, too, has taken on a priority. Thus, the ensuing block of literacy instruction is a balance of whole group spelling/phonics instruction; flexible, small group reading discussion groups; and individualized folder/workbook

work.

In the 3–4 grades, the teachers promote a very independent, individualized approach where children are engaged in self-selecting trade books; writing ongoing reading journal entries and summaries; conferencing with teachers and sharing their new knowledge and interests with each other. The teachers stress the importance of teaching children to choose books at their proper level and to expose them to all genres. They also spend a great deal of time making sure the library has the appropriate amount of materials for their range of children. "We're really open and we talk a lot about levels, nothing's a baby book, we model how we like to read."

Results

At least 80% of Carlisle's second and fourth graders are performing at the state standard on the Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment and New Standards Reference Examination Reading Subtests administered in the Spring of 1998.

Replication Details

When considering this approach for your school, consider the following elements of Carlisle School's literacy program as described in the case study:

- Block of literacy instruction is a balance of whole group spelling/phonics instruction
- Flexible, small group reading discussion groups; and individualized folder/workbook
- Phonological awareness a priority
- Guided reading approach
- Invest a tremendous amount of time making sure library has the appropriate amount of materials for total range of children.
- Work hard on having the children reading at their level, especially the third graders (use Reader's Workshop)
- Reading is connected to the journal writing; insist on having them write frequently about their reading
- Reading recovery provides essential service to individual children and defines the classroom practice
- Many America Reads volunteers
- Provide times for teachers to interact about students learning on a daily basis

Costs and Funding

No information is available at this time.

Contact Information

This information is not yet available.

Rating Criteria

In order to ensure the inclusion of an accurate representation of schools statewide this study employed a two-tiered selection process.

First, all schools were sorted into three clusters based on school size, school diversity, community size, community SES, and "degree of 'rurality'."

Schools were then sorted based on their second graders performance on the Vermont-Developmental Reading Assessment test and their fourth graders performance on the basic understanding and analysis/interpretation portions of the New Standards Reference Examination, NSRE.

From within each cluster, two schools with at least 80% of their second and fourth graders performing at the state standard were selected.

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Students can attain high levels of literacy when teachers are well qualified to teach, especially through excellent preservice preparation and through ongoing and substantive professional development in literacy.

Students can attain high levels of literacy when school staff work together toward a shared vision and have genuine respect for each other.

Elwood School

Elwood School

Elwood, VT

School Type: Public

**School
Setting:** Suburban

Level: K–8

**School
Design:** Traditional

Content Presented By:

University of Vermont



The Education Alliance at Brown
University



As is common among schools in Vermont, the Elwood School serves as its town's center of activity, hosting fall festivals, town celebrations, and the like. With 213 students in grades K–6, it is a small school in a small town.

The poverty rate (7%) and the percentage of students receiving free and reduced-priced lunches (15%) are both lower than in many similar towns, however, attesting to the more uniformly middle class status of this community. About 1/3 of local adults have a high school diploma, another 20% have a college degree, and fewer than 10% have any graduate or professional degrees. Another 13% have no high school diploma. Many parents commute to professional jobs in the nearby larger towns.

Elwood, a place with a history of success in the areas of reading and language arts, has enjoyed a reputation as a "good" school for two decades. The recently retired principal and the mostly veteran teachers began taking courses in reading in the 1970s. This early work laid the foundation for individualized reading, an engagement with books, and a confidence about reading instruction. Just a bit later, teachers became deeply involved in process writing approaches. One of their grade 4 teachers has been a strong leader in statewide writing networks from the earliest days. A striking feature is the extent to which the school went out and brought professional experiences into the building, via district resources or local ones. The leadership at Elwood has been largely local.

Although Elwood teachers do not use the word "eclectic" to describe their practice, it is nevertheless a characteristic of it. Reading and writing practices vary by classroom, especially at the earliest levels. Teachers talk about having the freedom to make decisions about curricular materials and approaches, to "use whatever is best for kids."

Teachers make extensive use of paraeducators. They point to these paraeducators' who are included in all significant professional development and participate in training, and are paid for such, as central to their success. The paraeducators are supported with local money. Elwood does not presently qualify for Title I money, so the district, over the past 5 years, has been willing to fund both the instructional assistants and the reading teacher using local funds. This commitment to the schools by the local school boards was also cited as one influence on student performance.

Teachers at Elwood attribute considerable influence to longtime principal Lesley Jacobs. She led a group of teachers to take courses in the 1970s and then, when she became principal of Elwood, continued to be very involved in literacy. She took courses herself, recommended them to her teachers, and went with them to others. Teachers talk about her graduate degree in Reading and Language Arts, the fact that she was perceived as a reading expert, and her involvement at the state level. Both grade 2 teachers as well as Jacobs have M.Ed. degrees in reading and language arts. Several other teachers at Elwood have 40–60 credits beyond the B.A. degree.

Teachers describe how Jacobs supported them through the years, encouraging them to use varied materials and approaches as long as the children continued to make progress in their reading and writing. During the 1980s, experts were brought into the district to provide in-service training for aspects of process writing. These teachers already had an established sense of confidence about their teaching, but under Jacobs' leadership, they also reexamined their practices.

Starting in 1992, the school began to explore the reading strategies suggested by Marie Clay, hired a Reading Recovery Teacher in the building, and engaged in professional development related to acquiring knowledge and skill in early literacy. Almost all professional development was provided at the school by one of the state's leading literacy experts, also a member of the community. In addition, a K–3 Literacy Committee was created. These strategies created a strong "internal community."

Staff at Elwood have benefited from supportive and knowledgeable administrators who have been willing to support and develop individual teachers' expertise. Indeed, this leadership seemed to understand that a veteran and confident faculty required special handling. Leadership was not exercised as an authoritarian imposition of policy. Rather, educational leaders in this building tried to honor the experience and caring of long-time teachers at the same time that the teachers were encouraged or even required to move in new directions.

Collegial conversations, common readings and courses, and time to develop and plan seem essential to the ongoing professional renewal of Elwood. In other words, autonomy, individual variation, and eclectic methods were tolerated, even celebrated, as long as everyone agreed on the common ground that laid the foundation for these differences.

Demographics

Elwood is a small town. The local poverty rate (7%) and the percentage of students receiving free and reduced-priced lunches (15%) are both lower than in many similar towns, however, attesting to the more uniformly middle-class status of this community. About 1/3 of local adults have a high school diploma, another 20% have a college degree, and fewer than 10% have any graduate or professional degrees. Another 13% have no high school diploma. Many parents commute to professional jobs in the nearby larger towns.

Background

Elwood has enjoyed a reputation as a "good" school for two decades. It serves as the center of activity for the town, and parents are deeply involved in and committed to the school's activities and to their students' achievement. Among K–3 faculty, the average number of years at this school is 19, with the total years of experience considerably higher than that. The recently retired principal and the most veteran teachers began taking courses in reading in the 1970s. This early work laid the foundation for individualized reading, USSR (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading), an engagement with books, and a confidence about reading instruction. Just a bit later, teachers became deeply involved in process writing approaches. One of their grade 4 teachers has been a strong leader in statewide

writing networks from the earliest days. Elwood is a place with a history of success in the areas of reading and language arts.

There is a positive home-school connection, and school staff are perceived by the community as doing a good job. The teachers have been there for an average of 17 years (ranging from 4 to 28). The long-time principal of this building was highly regarded and appears to have established a sense of trust as well.

Design & Implementation

As noted earlier, the faculty of Elwood and their recently retired principal began professional development in literacy very seriously, starting in the late 1970s. Beginning in 1992, the school began to explore the reading strategies suggested by Marie Clay, hired a Reading Recovery teacher in the building, and engaged in professional development related to acquiring knowledge and skill in early literacy. The introduction of the PIERS strategies (an overview introduction to Reading Recovery techniques) was a result of this work. They also began to address issues of assessment. Almost all of this professional development was provided at the school by one of the state's leading literacy experts, also a member of the community. In conjunction with this staff development work, a K-3 Literacy Committee was created. These strategies created a strong "internal community."

Teachers at Elwood do not use a block scheduling approach. However, they make extensive use of paraeducators. There are 6 full-time instructional assistants in the K-4 classrooms, and 5 of the 6 have a long history with the school. Two have been there for 21 years; three others have been there for 18, 16, and 14 years, respectively. The teachers of Elwood point to these paraeducators as central to their success. Importantly, the paraeducators are included in all significant professional development. They participate in training and are paid to attend.

Interestingly, the school supports these paraeducators with local money. Elwood does not presently qualify for Title I money and so the district, over the past 5 years, has been willing to fund both the instructional assistants and the reading teacher using local funds. This commitment to the schools by the local school boards was also cited as one influence on the student performance.

Results

At least 80% of Elwood's second and fourth graders are performing at the state standard on the Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment and New Standards Reference Examination Reading Subtests, as administered in the Spring of 1998.

Replication Details

Teachers appear to have been supported in their eclectic approaches by building leadership that capitalized on the individual strengths of the faculty. Coherence was achieved, in part, through careful attention to assessment and record keeping.

Elwood achieved stability by virtue of strong leadership and extensive professional development. Importantly, this leadership seemed to understand that a veteran and confident faculty required special handling. Leadership was not exercised as an authoritarian imposition of policy. Rather, educational leaders in this building tried to honor the experience and caring of long-time teachers at the same time that the teachers were encouraged or even required to move in new directions.

Costs and Funding

No information on costs and funding is available at this time.

Contact Information

No contact information is available at this time.

Rating Criteria

In order to ensure the inclusion of an accurate representation of schools statewide, this study employed a two-tiered selection process. First, all schools were sorted into three clusters based on school size, school diversity, community size, community SES, and "degree of 'rurality'." Schools were then sorted based on their second graders' performance on the Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment test and their fourth graders' performance on the basic understanding and analysis/interpretation portions of the New Standards Reference Examination. From within each cluster, two schools with at least 80% of their second and fourth graders performing at the state standard were selected.

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Students can attain high levels of literacy when there is quality leadership and a championing of literacy.

Sommers School

Sommers School

Sommers, VT

School Type: Public

School Setting: Rural

Level: K–8

School

Design: Traditional

Content Presented By:

University of Vermont

The Education Alliance at Brown
University



Sommers School, the learning place of 160 Vermont students in grades K–8, sits on a rise above a tiny village 15 miles from a small state college and its surrounding town. As one approaches the town from a long, winding dirt road, the white steeple of a church is the first thing visible. There are no stores, filling stations, or other businesses. What stands out are the farms (lots of them) and small houses: some well kept, others not.

The families of Sommers are primarily poor and anglo. More than 23% of townspeople do not have high school diplomas; 14% of those have less than a 9th grade education. Only 17% of the adults have attained any education beyond the high school level, and 57% of the school's children qualify for free and reduced-priced lunch. Local families, whose members work as laborers, loggers, seasonal workers, and farmers, have strong roots in the community; teachers report little transience.

The boundaries between school, community, and family are somewhat difficult to distinguish within this remote and very small school. As the principal remarked, "The teachers see the school as an extension of themselves, their families. They have a strong sense of ownership about this school."

Management of routines is exemplary, with no noticeable off-task behavior. Hardly any time is taken with transitions or behavior management. While there are some challenging children in these classrooms, the teachers are highly skilled and the use of paraeducators and special education assistants provides additional support. Consequently, almost all the time allocated for literacy is engaged time.

Sommers began to undertake real change approximately 10 years ago. One energetic and inspiring colleague, Wendy, was trained as a Reading Recovery Teacher during the 1991–93 time frame. Wendy attended a Whole Language conference in 1988 and was influenced by Don Holdaway. She began working on her M.Ed. in 1990 and in 1993 was trained as a Reading Recovery Teacher. Thus began the influence she has had on her colleagues to this day. She modeled strategies, took her teammates along to conferences, and shared her enthusiasm for methodology she believed made a difference for individual children.

Wendy's colleagues, in turn, took "Supportive Classroom" and "Guided Reading" courses, often taught by Wendy and sponsored by the school district. The Reading Recovery training strongly influences the practice of the primary team and more subtly guides the direction for teachers at grades

3 and 4. Carolyn, the 3rd grade teacher, reflects the inspiration and enthusiasm that is infectious within Sommers when she describes her return to teaching after a lengthy family hiatus: "I took a week-long, whole language course. I was so inspired that week. I got so excited about teaching reading and also it inspired me to start reading myself."

The faculty recognize that their approach to literacy has allowed them to "know the knower," or teach responsively to individual children. In addition, they argue that this approach has influenced student performance because of the consistent instruction that has resulted. They pointed to the importance of the children using the same strategies, terms, and languages throughout the primary grades.

The teachers recognize the importance of the past principal in supporting the move to guided reading and whole language. Though that principal is no longer at Sommers, the curriculum coordinator from that time is. Indeed, she is now the superintendent. Thus, the continuity of support and commitment to professional development complementary to what has been implemented factors into the success of the Sommers' students on statewide literacy assessments.

One teacher at Sommers remarked that the current principal, Susan, has been helpful and savvy, in that she "supports and appreciates" the teachers in what they do. Another colleague's remark—"I really think we would have done what we're doing regardless of who the administrator was unless they told us we couldn't!"—clearly exemplifies the knowledge, expertise, and commitment of this tiny staff. It also points to the ownership of change at Sommers. The change came from extensive professional development, but of the homegrown variety, relying heavily on teacher mentoring and collegiality. Individual teachers sought opportunities through participation in graduate programs, statewide professional conferences, and Whole Language meetings.

The teachers at Sommers appear to genuinely value their teammates and the relationships that have been developed around the work that they do. Carolyn shares how one colleague greatly inspired her to continue learning and going to continuing education offerings. "We are all moving in the same direction," she says. "We are a true team."

Demographics

Sommers School sits on a rise above a tiny village approximately 15 miles from a small state college and its surrounding town; no stores, filling stations, or other businesses are visible. Farms and small houses are close by. The school population of 160 includes students in grades K–8. The residents of Sommers are mostly poor, poorly educated, and anglo. More than 23% of the people do not have a high school diploma, and about 14% of those have less than a 9th grade education. Only 17% of the adults have attained any education beyond the high school level, and 57% of the school's population qualifies for free and reduced lunch. Few professionals reside in this community.

Background

Though the school serves a relatively homogeneous community, the literacy strengths of the students entering the school are undeveloped. The school resides happily in the community, and the teachers share community norms as long-time teachers there. The shared history and background of the children, teachers, and school community helps to prevent the kind of "gate-keeping" that occurs when teachers and students do not share cultural norms. The larger professional development environment in Vermont from the late 1980s to 1990s was vibrant, and Sommers' teachers took advantage of that vibrancy.

Design & Implementation

Sommers has reached agreement on a focused, responsive approach to literacy instruction through the principles of Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery is a research-based program of instruction tailored to the needs of the at-risk primary grade student. The program's practices and adaptations by the Sommers teachers are well matched to the student population, to the rural, remote environment, and to the diminished literacy skills the children bring to school.

Teachers devote large amounts of time for literacy – approximately 90–120 minutes per day. During these periods, children read a great deal. Children in grades K–2 read with the teacher each day for periods of up to 25 minutes. Among children in grades 3–4, most read for at least 30 minutes each day. There are also silent reading times each day and a daily read-aloud time.

All teachers at Sommers implement the "block" of literacy time and use it for the purpose of engaging with text. Field notes describe how all teachers mention the value and priority of read-aloud; they all seem to have a clear provision for some reading practice (whether paired or silent); they maintain individualized book lists for each child (passed along from grades 1–3); and Anne, the 4th grade teacher, does book groups and self-selected reading, and talks about choice and ownership (with her students).

Teachers across all K–3 classrooms implement the guided reading approach. They meet with small, flexible groups, using individual titles and sets of books that have been leveled according to Reading Recovery standards (1–20) for younger readers and the text gradient system of Fountas and Pinnell (Guided Reading) for somewhat older readers. The 3rd and 4th grades use trade books and are engaged with the likes of Stone Fox, Marvin Redpost, Ramona, The BFG, Bridge to Terabithia, Enormous Egg, etc. Children have access to many books, not just within their classrooms, but also from the 7,000–volume library collection and from the common "book room" for all leveled texts. Explicit teaching of skills is present along with this infusion of literature. Although teachers take skills instruction seriously, it is embedded in literature and offered somewhat opportunistically. Teachers take on-going assessment very seriously. They use the Observaton Survey for all children and maintain weekly running records.

Finally, Reading Recovery provides essential services to individual children and defines the types of classroom practices employed by teachers. There are also Title I and Special Education professionals to supplement the work of the half-time Reading Recovery teacher, who is a half-time classroom teacher.

Results

At least 80% of Sommers' second and fourth graders are performing at the state standard on the Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment and New Standards Reference Examination Reading Subtests, as administered in the Spring of 1998. The faculty recognize that their approach to literacy has allowed them to "know the knower," or teach responsively to individual children. In addition, they argue that this approach has influenced student performance because of the consistent instruction that has resulted. They point to the importance of the children using the same strategies, terms, and language throughout the primary grades.

Replication Details

Sommers is an isolated, rural environment. Wendy and her fellow teachers might have been stymied in a larger environment, one with more points of view and a clientele more diverse in ability and quantity of needs. In their rural environment, they could do what they felt was needed. In this case, the union of Whole Language and Reading Recovery practices did not disintegrate in a whole

language/phonics war that many other schools in Vermont underwent during the 1980s and early 1990s.

It is also worth mentioning that Reading Recovery was not developed as a school or classroom program. It is a clinical program relying on well-trained tutors working daily 1-on-1 with students in 1st grade for up to 16 weeks. Though these practices have been adapted by researchers to classroom settings, the uptake and implementation of these principles of instruction at Sommers is due to the knowledge, expertise, and leadership of individuals within the faculty. In addition, given the very small size of the staff and students, and the low class size, these teachers were able to tailor these practices in the most effective ways for the students involved. Finally, the comradery among faculty is strong – again, perhaps the result of a faculty cultivated over the years and a faculty of such a size (5–6 teachers) – that issues of communication and variable commitment did not play a role.

Costs and Funding

No information on costs and funding is available at this time.

Contact Information

No contact information is available at this time.

Rating Criteria

In order to ensure the inclusion of an accurate representation of schools statewide, this study employed a two-tiered selection process. First, all schools were sorted into three clusters based on school size, school diversity, community size, community SES, and "degree of "rurality"." Schools were then sorted based on their second graders' performance on the Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment test and their fourth graders' performance on the basic understanding and analysis/interpretation portions of the New Standards Reference Examination. From within each cluster, two schools with at least 80% of their second and fourth graders performing at the state standard were selected.

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Students can attain high levels of literacy when teachers are well qualified to teach, especially through excellent preservice preparation and through ongoing and substantive professional development in literacy.

Mary Lyon School (K–8)

Mary Lyon School (K–8)

Boston, MA

School Type: Public

School Setting: Urban

Level: K–8

School Design:

Content Presented By:

Located in a middle class neighborhood in Boston, Mary Lyon School is a full inclusion, K–8 school that features instruction in small groups so that teachers can focus on student needs. The use of interns from local colleges and the inclusion of special needs children in regular reading instruction reduce class size. Smaller class size, professional development, and school planning support flexibility and continuous improvement of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Principal Mary Nash provides educational leadership and influences the school climate by piloting instructional techniques and by promoting a research-oriented perspective to teaching. Teachers form cross-grade level teams and study groups to look at student performance and to plan ways to increase student proficiency.

Leading characteristics of the school's literacy program

Mary Lyon School uses Balanced Early Literacy Strategies, BEL Mondo(www.mondopub.com), a program for developing decoding skills and comprehension through trade book materials. The school has moved from a basal reading program to trade books. The school administers the Observation Survey and Running Records for emerging readers in kindergarten and the first grade and closely documents and follows a student's oral language development. Mary Lyons School has benchmarked the levels of all of its texts. A schoolwide Title I program allows limited "pull-out" instruction, and all reading instruction occurs in the classroom.

Additional features of the literacy program include strategies and approaches from the world of special education, notably the Wisnia Kapp reading program (www.tiac.net/users/wkrp). Wisnia Kapp uses a kinesthetic approach, showing students step-by-step how to visualize what they read. Graphic organizers help children see and understand what they have to do. "We have to figure out what is the hidden curriculum – what are the skills children need to become proficient. For example, we teach children how to know what is their "just right level" for selecting a book to read and use "story grammar markers" for teaching comprehension. We teach this way because the children do not come to school with this way of thinking," says Principal Mary Nash.

Consistent schoolwide reading strategies include teachers reading aloud, students reading aloud, "think-alouds," pre-reading strategies, sightword instruction, and computer supported instruction. Literacy-building activities include take-home books, books on tape, the use of trade books, learning centers, homework, a wide variety of reading materials, classroom libraries, school library, incentives, field trips, and multicultural events.

The staff uses standards to identify what is important to teach students. Trained in accelerated learning and in the principles of the Institute for Learning, the school staff has used New Standards and the Massachusetts literacy standards to "map backwards" to identify what children need to learn at all grades to be ready for standardized performance tests in fourth grade. Through this process, they

have found the gaps in their curriculum and where they need to deepen their teaching. Since the Massachusetts Department of Education releases 80% of the test questions each year, teachers are able to examine those questions and their students' responses.

Looking at teacher assignments and student work

Analyzing teacher assignments at the school serves multiple purposes; it helps teachers reflect on their instruction and its effects on students, it helps parents and community members understand and help shape what happens in the classroom, and it helps the school community track progress. (MacMullen and Wentworth, 2000)

Principal Mary Nash explains: "We've been looking at student work as a tool to improve assignments and lessons since 1997. We began by asking teachers to bring a copy of the assignment, and three samples of student work, one on level, one above level and one below level. We asked two questions: 1) Show us how you know this is the level work you say it is. 2) What is the next teaching step for each child? Teachers found that they knew what the next steps were for the on-level and below-level child, but not for the above-level child. That started a whole new conversation. Teachers realized they did not have the vision of the curriculum they need to move all children to proficiency.

We became explicit about content, performance and opportunity to learn standards. Now teachers ask themselves slightly different questions: 1) How do I know as a teacher if my assignment was good enough to enable my students to meet or exceed the standards? 2) How do I know if I have given my students either too much support or not enough support to meet or exceed the standards?

The school also brings teachers from different grades together for study groups. "We modeled our study groups on how Japanese elementary school teachers study together to work on one lesson. Teachers have one question they are trying to answer. We ask what is the most important concept to teach at a specific grade in a reading or writing. We read together about these big concepts, we discuss how to introduce the concept, then what to do, and finally we pilot a lesson. One teacher creates a model lesson, then teaches it and another observes the impact of the lesson on the students, especially for unintended consequences. Then the teacher refines the lesson. Finally, the lesson is given to the school as a gift. Study groups like this meet for about two-month cycles," Principal Mary Nash explains.

Parent involvement in literacy

"Our students didn't know how to talk with their parents about what they did in school. So every week at the end of the week one of the teachers started asking her students, what did you like about school this week, and she sent home a newsletter to parents with what the children said. Parents were pleased to find there was something concrete they could talk to their child about school. It opened doors of communication and we've been doing it for years now."

The school staff requests that parents read to their children at least 15 minutes every day. Teachers also assign homework regularly and seek parent support to make sure it is completed.

When the school started preparing children for standardized tests, first for Stanford 9 tests, and then for the MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System), parents knew about it and became concerned how to help their children. The staff felt a need to teach children coping skills and to prepare them for the difficulty of these tests. About a third of the students have disabilities and parents were fearful of the tests. Two parent liaisons wanted to change the conversation among parents, and to show them how to support their children. The two parent liaisons began to talk with

teachers. Soon the teachers had taught them how to ask children about their work. Then they ran a series of workshops for other parents. Parents learned how to ask their children two questions: 1) Can you show me how your work was good enough (to meet or exceed the standard)? 2) What do you have to do to get to the next level; how will you improve your work? Currently, about half the parents have attended these trainings.

Demographics

Built in 1914, the Mary Lyon School is located on a quiet street in a middle class neighborhood of Boston. About a third of the students walk to school, and the majority of students live in the Brighton–Allston section of the city. Partly because of the school's relative small size, parents consider it a "family-oriented" school. The first renovation to the school took place in the fall of 2000 to allow space for additional upper grades.

Socioeconomic context

Opened in 1992 as a model full-inclusion school, the Mary Lyon School challenges the traditional district practice in special education of contracting with agencies outside the school system for services for children with severe special needs. Instead, the district gives the school this budget for contracted services, based on the average amount of money per child who would receive an outside placement. With this budget, the school serves both regular and special education students. This structure challenges the school to teach reading in heterogeneous groups and to provide the professional development to teachers so that all students can become proficient.

School enrollment

In 1996, 80 students, K–5 were enrolled. By the end of the school year, 1999, 94 students were enrolled, K–8.

Student racial/ethnic composition:

In 1998–1999, student enrollment is:

Asian	7.4%
Black	44.7%
Hispanic	12.8%
White	35.1%

Limited English Proficient enrollment:

In 1996 the Family Language Index (FLI) was 0.60, about the same as the district (60% of students said a language other than English was spoken at home never or occasionally, Appendix A, Indicators Study). In 1999–2000, 13% of students were Limited–English Proficient.

Students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch (FRPL):

In 1996 the FRPL index was 0.15, the same as the district (15% of students did not receive free or reduced price lunch, Appendix A, Indicators Study). In 1999–2000, 65% of students received free or reduced price lunch.

Students receiving special education services:

In a class of fifteen students, ten seats are reserved for "typical" Boston Public School students. They could include children who would receive special education services in a "typical" school. Five seats per class are reserved for severely emotionally disturbed children. Together, over 40% of students receive special education services.

Background

See the Mary Lyon Elementary School Report on Teaching and Learning, on the web at <http://www.boston.k12.ma.us/schools/rc339.asp>. The Report describes accomplishments and goals for the school.

"The Mary Lyon School is a K–8 learning community (grade 8 phased in September 2000). We believe that every student is a child in continuous development, and we believe that our students will hold jobs in the 21st century which will require them to work on teams and find solutions to common problems. Therefore, we teach our students learning strategies to support their growing capacity to solve problems both as individuals as well as members of a team." – Mary Lyon mission statement

Design & Implementation

The school is a model for full integration of special needs students with regular education students, with a maximum class size of 15. All of the teachers hold Master's degrees, and all of the classroom teachers are dually certified in both regular and special education. The school has grown, with new grades being added yearly, from a K–5 school to one that now serves grades K–8.

Component parts of implementation

- Teachers and interns work together in teams across grades.
- Formative assessment tools at the beginning, middle and end of the year, include The Observation Survey and Running Records for emerging readers in kindergarten and first grade; the Scholastic Reading Inventory and/or the Developmental Reading Assessment, grades 2–8.
- Staff has adopted a philosophy of mastery learning.
- The school provides a transitional accelerated learning program for students at risk for failing MCAS at grades 4 or 8; the school provides a 3–week summer program and year–long small group tutoring after school sessions.
- School is fully wired to the Internet, and computers are networked to each other.
- Before and after school programs are offered for all students.
- Teachers' lesson plans implement content, performance and opportunity to learn standards.
- Parents work with teachers to complete assignments and homework and are asked to read to their children 15 minutes per day.

Results

Student work samples – the school would like to include a few samples

Academic achievement on the MCAS – ELA 1999 percentage of students at each performance level

Level	School	District	State
Level 1/failing	0%	30	12
Level 2/needs improvement	86%	62	67
Level 3/proficient	14%	5	21

Level 4/advanced 0% 0 0

Academic achievement on the MCAS – ELA 2000 percentage of students at each performance level

Level	School District State		
Level 1/failing	8%	34	13
Level 2/needs improvement	84%	60	67
Level 3/proficient	8%	6	19
Level 4/advanced	0%	0	1

The Mary Lyon School's average score on the ELA portion of the MCAS was higher than both the district or the state's average score in both 1999 and 2000.

In 2000, on Stanford 9 open-ended tests, all the students in the school scored in level 3 or 4 in English Language Arts with 62% in level 3 and 38% in level 4.

Replication Details

NOTE: If you have not already read the "Design and Implementation" section, selecting that from the menu before reading further will provide a context for the replication details below.

Costs and Funding

"The Mary Lyon School was one of the first schools in Boston to have control over its budget. Our budget is school based. We get a lump sum and can use it to buy what teachers are passionate about. In the early years the money was for start-up materials; and we still buy a lot of trade books." – Mary Nash, Principal

In their examination of five high-performing urban schools (one of which is the Mary Lyon School), Miles and Darling-Hammond (1997) document the importance of school-based allocation of resources. The authors found that by imaginatively reallocating existing teaching staff, the schools reduced class size, personalized the learning environment, and expanded staff development. The authors use data from a sample of three elementary and two secondary schools that had engaged in significant rethinking of resources, used no significant extra resources, served a diverse population, had used a model for at least two years, and had evidence of strong and improving student performance. They conclude that resource allocation and the design of an instructional vision and strategy are intertwined. Common strategies included: reduction of specialized programs, more flexible student grouping, structures to support more personal relationships, longer and more varied blocks of instructional time, more common planning time for staff, and creative definition of staff roles and work schedules.

Additional funding:

- Boston Public Schools study group grants
- Annenberg Challenge funds to district cohort schools
- Gift to school of \$1 million dollars for renovation of building, with matching funds from the city of Boston, 1999–2000

Contact Information

Mary Nash, Principal

Rating Criteria

The Mary Lyon School is one of a dozen high poverty, urban elementary schools that obtained higher assessment results on state administered tests in the area of reading/literacy than other similar schools in their districts. The school was identified in the *Indicators of Capacity for School Reform Project Massachusetts Literacy Study* based largely on high scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in third grade reading during the 1996–97 school year. Specifically, only schools whose scores exceeded their district average by at least twenty points were included. (58% of Mary Lyon third graders scored Advanced.) That same year, Massachusetts began implementing the first round of standardized tests based on the MA curriculum frameworks and learning goals. Based on this additional data from MCAS language arts tests given to 4th graders since 1997, the Mary Lyon performs significantly higher than its district and higher than the state average scaled score.

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Students can attain high levels of literacy when teachers are well qualified to teach, especially through excellent preservice preparation and through ongoing and substantive professional development in literacy.

Students can attain high levels of literacy when school staff and parents are partners.

Students can attain high levels of literacy when the school staff actively and frequently uses student data to inform and improve instruction.

Students can attain high levels of literacy when there is quality leadership and a championing of literacy.

Students can attain high levels of literacy when school staff work together toward a shared vision and have genuine respect for each other.

Arthur T. Talmadge Elementary School

Arthur T. Talmadge Elementary School

Springfield, MA

School Type: Public

School Setting: Urban

Level: Elementary

School Design: Traditional

Content Presented By:

Located on a busy street on the edge of a leafy middle class neighborhood in the Sixteen Acres section of Springfield, the Arthur Talmadge School is a traditional K–5 elementary school which features instruction in small groups so that teachers can focus on student needs. A school sign swings from its post next to the parking lot in front of the school, announcing to all that this little school takes pride in itself. The school focus is on time for learning and on setting high standards for both children at risk for reading failure and children who are at or above standard. The school mission is to teach all students to their full potential. Regular reading instruction takes place in a class size lowered by teachers and specialists working together. The smaller class, together with a consistent approach to literacy and school planning, support flexibility and continuing improvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Focus on literacy

All staff work together to promote literacy. A schoolwide Title I program, there is limited pull-out, and reading takes place in class in small groups. With the whole school on a block schedule all day long, reading takes place every day for 100–120 minutes. Because few students leave the classroom and all teachers focus on literacy, the school has been able to reduce class size from about 28 students to 15–17 students per teacher.

Because of its small size and consistent approach to literacy, the school offers a professional community for teachers. Significant time, resources, and supplemental support are dedicated to literacy at the school, and teachers are held accountable for student progress. A strong work ethic prevails at the school. The reading coordinator is at the school five days a week, and teaches both a first grade group and a second grade group each morning. Staff meet formally with her once a month and grade level groups meet weekly. Staff at each grade level meet with the principal to review assessments results from standardized tests, state administered tests, curriculum tests and computer program assessments to identify instructional needs. Much of the communication among staff, however, is informal and the sharing of materials is frequent. All teachers in the school are considered "regular" teachers.

Several reading interventions were not successful in the school; the school's homegrown approach is what works best. The school sets higher standards for student success than the district, for example in reading comprehension and writing, and uses some but not all of the district assessments which the staff believes take too much time away from instruction. Formal professional development is organized district-wide, but much of the planning is done by staff at Talmadge for Talmadge students.

The school provides a community for families, too, but holds parents accountable for their part. For example, the before school program, funded with a multi-year grant from the American Association of Supervisors and Administrators, depends on parents' driving their children to school before the regular school day begins. These children are offered additional time for reading and writing in the morning when they are alert. Parents volunteer to read with children during the school day, and assist in the library and in the computer room. Parents and community members read aloud at special events held monthly at the school. The school expects parents to make sure students do homework and keep up with weekly assignments in spelling. Students also complete a major reading assignment over the summer.

Leading characteristics of the school's literacy program

The school staff implements a basal reading program (utilizing both Houghton Mifflin and D.C. Heath publications) that emphasizes skills (such as phonics) and comprehension, and supplements the program with literature, additional skills and related activities. Reading and writing instruction take place in small performance groups. Placement is based on individual screening using an assessment instrument developed at the school, and groups sometimes cross grade levels. Once students are assigned to groups, they most often stay with their group for the year. The focus is on small group instruction with attention to individual needs.

The school has followed its own path to develop its philosophy and instructional methods in literacy. Many teachers at the school are veteran teachers who did not pursue a "whole class instruction" approach to literacy that the district was advocating. Instead, with the principal's approval, the staff kept teaching a traditional combination of phonics, word attack skills, and comprehension strategies. The school developed its own initial screening instrument for kindergarten and first grade, and relies on basal readers and the assessments in them for continuity.

Consistent school-wide reading and writing strategies are key. They include teachers reading aloud, students reading aloud, think alouds, reading for meaning, sustained silent reading, paired or buddy reading, reading of content materials, pre-reading strategies, sight word instruction, independent reading time, directed reading and thinking activity. In recent years, the staff has changed its approach to writing instruction, focusing more on standards-based instruction with attention to rubrics and exemplars for good writing in line with the expectations for excellence on the MA state assessments in writing.

Teachers use a variety of materials to supplement and reinforce the basals. Literacy-related activities include take home books, big books, the use of trade books and a variety of reading materials, homework, classroom libraries, a school library, field trips, and multicultural events. Activities for students in the school, like the after-school scrabble club, strengthen students' spelling and vocabulary skills. (In fact, the school sent two students to the state scrabble championship in 2000, and although they had never played tournament scrabble before, they made it to the final rounds.) The school is proud that students who graduate from the school often come back to volunteer as homework tutors, mentors and scrabble coaches.

Demographics

A one-story building built in 1954 and located on the edge of a middle class area of Springfield, the Talmadge School is not a neighborhood school. About half of the students live within a one-mile radius of the school and walk (or are driven) to school, and about half of students live nearby in the central city and are bused (or are driven) to school.

Socioeconomic context

Springfield Public Schools, the second largest district in MA, is operating under a twenty-six year old court order (1974) to desegregate its schools, which the city achieves through cross-town busing. The district as a whole in 1999 was about 31% African American, 41% Hispanic, 2% Asian and 26% white. Approximately 12% of students are LEP.

School enrollment

In 1995, 294 students, K-5 were enrolled. In the school year 1999-2000, 340 students are enrolled.

Student racial/ethnic composition: In 1998-1999

African American	34.8%
Asian	2.7%
Hispanic	15.2%
white	47.3%

Background

Springfield Public Schools uses a choice system for school assignments; the school is popular among families and students, and is considered one of the best elementary schools in the system.

Design & Implementation

"We know the children individually," states Principal John M. Fitzgerald. "The school is a special place to learn." Teachers describe the strong work ethic of the school, and their accountability for student progress, but they also note the autonomy they have had in developing the school's literacy curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The school's mission is to teach all students to their full potential, and the method is to structure the school day so that students learn in small performance groups with well-prepared teachers.

The school's home grown design for literacy is a careful balance of traditional literacy instruction and standards-based approaches to instruction. Basal readers are used school-wide and supplemented with a variety of materials and activities.

Component parts of implementation

- Organizing the school day and instructional focus around literacy
- Performance grouping for literacy
- Shared assessment and placement for students across grades
- Great teachers, well-prepared in literacy and hard-working
- Small group instruction with attention to individuals
- Students move at their own pace
- A school-wide literacy coordinator who also teaches
- Continual adjustments and flexibility in instruction
- Alternatives and supplementary program materials
- Open and sharing community for teachers where staff works together
- Before school programs for all students at risk
- Parent support throughout the school year and during the summer
- Principal's leadership and willingness to let teachers organize program

- Afterschool mentoring, tutoring and club activities
- Trust in long-term changes

Results

Academic achievement on the MCAS – ELA 1999 percentage of students at each performance level

Level 1/failing	9%	26%	12%
Level 2/needs improvement	72%	66%	67%
Level 3/proficient	14%	7%	21%
Level 4/advanced	5%	0%	0%

Academic achievement on the MCAS – ELA 2000 percentage of students at each performance level

Level 1/failing	0%	24%	13%
Level 2/needs improvement	65%	69%	67%
Level 3/proficient	31%	7%	19%
Level 4/advanced	4%	0%	1%

Compared with the district and the state on MCAS in ELA, the Talmadge is higher performing. While Talmadge earned a respectable 238 scaled score for the MCAS in 2000, the MA DOE calls a scaled score of 240 proficient.

Replication Details

The school is constrained by limited control over its own budget, receiving money only for Title 1 programs (which support two teachers) and for materials. Notwithstanding, its strategies for allocating resources include: reduction of specialized programs, more flexible student grouping, structures to support more personal relationships, longer and more varied blocks of instructional time, more common planning time for staff, and creative definition of staff roles and work schedules.

Additional funding:

- business partner, the Exchange Club of Springfield
- Parent Teacher Organization
- American Association of Supervision and Administration grant for the before school program

For information on average expenditures in Springfield Public Schools, see the MA DOE website: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/default>

Costs and Funding

Contact Information

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Arthur T. Talmadge School

1395 Allen Street
Springfield, MA 01118
Phone: 413 787-7249
Fax
email

Rating Criteria

The Talmadge School is one of a dozen high poverty, urban elementary schools which obtained relatively higher assessment results on state administered standardized tests in the area of reading/literacy than other similar schools in their districts. The school was identified in the *Indicators of Capacity for School Reform Project Massachusetts Literacy Study* based largely on high scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in third grade reading during the 1996-97 school year. Specifically only schools whose scores exceeded their district average by at least twenty points were included. (79% of third graders at Talmadge School scored Proficient or Advanced in 1999.) In 1997 Massachusetts began implementing the first round of standardized tests based on the MA curriculum frameworks and learning goals. Based on this additional data from MCAS language arts standardized tests given to 4th graders, Talmadge performs significantly higher than its district, Springfield, and higher than the state average.

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Students can attain high levels of literacy when teachers believe that all students can succeed and when instruction is guided by student needs for literacy instruction.

Students can attain high levels of literacy when time is dedicated to literacy instruction and to exposure to literacy.

Students can attain high levels of literacy when school staff and parents are partners.

Students can attain high levels of literacy when there is quality leadership and a championing of literacy.

Students can attain high levels of literacy when school staff work together toward a shared vision and have genuine respect for each other.

South Creek School

South Creek School

South Creek, VT

School Type: Public

School

Setting: Suburban

Level: K–8

School

Design: Traditional

Content Presented By:

University of Vermont



The Education Alliance at Brown
University



South Creek School is located in a thriving village in a four-season resort area. The school is in an older building that shows evidence of multiple additions and renovations made over the years. It is within walking distance of many shops and community recreation and cultural centers. With a population of 290 students in grades K–5, the school is relatively large compared to many others in Vermont.

The residents of South Creek have education and income levels that exceed the state average: 67% have advanced education beyond a high school diploma, while just 23.6% have only a high school diploma, and another 8.9% do not have a high school diploma. A mere 11% of the school's population qualifies for free and reduced-priced lunch.

Anyone entering the South Creek School is greeted by a hand-painted sign which reads, "Children Are Our Future." The physical environment where daily learning takes place speaks to the priorities set by parents and teachers. There is a strong and visible emphasis on the fine and performing arts; children's art work, usually studied under the tutelage of visiting artists, adorns the walls of the school. Inspirational and thought-provoking quotes are posted in strategic places, and children's original stories are carefully displayed on hallway walls adjacent to classrooms.

What was once referred to as a "mish-mash" of philosophies in South Creek has been consolidated into a new vision of literacy instruction anchored by a basal program. Individual classroom teachers carry out this program within the framework of a daily language arts block. Children read the selected "story of the week" in homogeneous groups. Regardless of reading ability, all children in a grade are expected to read the same book. They are also encouraged to be part of impromptu book discussion groups, thematic reading, and/or enrichment opportunities.

Word level work takes place in groups, primarily through grammar and vocabulary workbooks, as well as through more eclectic spelling instruction. The staff is in the process of redesigning their spelling program. Margaret, a teacher at the school, explained how, "the literacy series dictates the groups as far as what the story of the week will be, but spelling groups and decoding groups are done by my assessments of what their skills are and what they need at the time."

Thus, the newly acquired basal program acts as a foundation for the common curriculum as each individual classroom teacher — with the support of the early literacy specialist and enrichment and remedial opportunities — implements it according to his or her own style and knowledge about a particular class.

Although South Creek has adopted a basal series for the uniformity in approach and material, time is also devoted to individual reading. There are large quantities of books in most of the classrooms, and the use of sustained silent reading and read-aloud is a ritual. The library is very generously stocked with books and other resources, and the librarian works closely with classroom teachers to support and complement curriculum and children's interests.

The teachers are universally committed to the literature anthology component of the basal series (and the commitment to read one story per grade level per week), but also express their need to be flexible with its use and supplements. Pat, one of the multi-age teachers, also balances the basal series with meeting the individual needs of the children. She states that the basal frames her program and that it is within that framework that she is able to address individual needs.

The teachers in South Creek have a genuine respect for each other. All will admit to past inclinations toward "whole language" versus "phonics." Yet they can see how working together and articulating a shared vision (via the Language Arts Curriculum work) have led to the success of the students on the statewide literacy assessments.

The relationships and understanding that have developed out of the professional interactions amongst teachers and administrators have led South Creek down a path of consensus building, shared vision, and respect. The staff value and welcome discourse and have discovered that they can learn from each other. The move to the basal fit with the configuration of factors operating at South Creek in the 1980s and 1990s. It is interesting that at a time when instruction was a "mish-mash" of approaches reflecting Whole Language and phonics wars, South Creek turned to the structured, common curriculum of the basal. "Following the literacy series," explains multi-age teacher Pat, "has given me the crutch to then build those levels and supports within."

Demographics

South Creek is located in a thriving village in a four-season resort area. The school is in an older building with evidence of multiple additions and renovations made over the years. It is within walking distance of many shops and community recreation and cultural centers. The residents of South Creek have education and income levels that exceed the state average: 67% have advanced education beyond a high school diploma; 23.6% have a high school diploma and 8.9% do not have a high school diploma. Only 11% of the school's population qualifies for free and reduced-priced lunch. The school population of 290 includes students in grades K–5.

Background

South Creek began looking seriously at its language arts curriculum in 1988. School staff wanted to increase the coordination of their language arts curriculum program across and within grades, increase communication among teachers, and include more intentional word-level instruction in their literacy program. The assistant superintendent (and former principal of the elementary school) had an energetic agenda to integrate more specific skill instruction and create more continuity of instruction throughout the school. Teachers at the time were using a variety of methods and materials with little agreement about the goals for the language arts program. Their practices were informed by substantial personal and professional development but did not form a common core of agreed upon goals. The

school was described by teachers and administrators alike as representing a "mish-mash" of instructional practices with "Whole Language and phonics camps." Also, the assistant superintendent expressed the community's view that as a school it must always keep improving. He stated, "It's a community where good is not good enough, and this whole issue about continuous improvement is pervasive."

Design & Implementation

Describe the planning process that preceded implementation, including the overriding philosophy and goal of the effort. Describe the component parts of implementation process: A Literacy Assessment course that all staff and administration took in 1994-1995 led to the development and implementation of a language arts curriculum, a literacy series, and the assessment portfolio. A few years later, an early literacy facilitator position was created to teach the teachers, based on current research, what children need in order to become literate.

What was once referred to as a "mish-mash" of philosophies at South Creek was consolidated into a new vision of literacy instruction anchored by a basal program. Now individual classroom teachers carry out this program within the framework of a daily language arts block. Children read the selected "story of the week" in homogeneous groups. Regardless of reading ability, all children in a grade are expected to read the same book. In addition, they are encouraged to be part of impromptu book discussion groups, thematic reading, and/or enrichment opportunities.

Word level work takes place in groups, primarily through grammar and vocabulary workbooks, as well as more eclectic spelling instruction. The staff is in the process of redesigning their spelling program.

With the basal series as the foundation, a first grade classroom showed similar practices. Field notes describe:

- a morning message that asks children to "fill in the blank" with letters/words that focus on consonant sounds in initial and medial positions; sight words; and capitalization
- a review of the week's spelling list
- children as a whole group aurally identifying words that rhyme (such as time/crime)

Results

At least 80% of South Creek's second and fourth graders are performing at the state standard on the Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment and New Standards Reference Examination Reading Subtests, as administered in the Spring of 1998. The newly acquired basal program acts as a foundation for the common curriculum as each individual classroom teacher -- with the support of the early literacy specialist and enrichment and remedial opportunities -- implements it according to her style and knowledge about her/his particular class. Teachers at South Creek manage their literacy instruction expertly. The flow of the day is orchestrated beautifully; children know what is expected of them and proceed accordingly. Little, if any, undue time is spent on transitions and behavior issues.

Replication Details

At a time when instruction represented a "mish-mash" of approaches reflecting whole language and phonics wars, South Creek turned to the structured, common curriculum of the basal. The size of South Creek may have played a role in this decision. It seems that in a time of struggle and low performance, a large school might turn to a program that put teachers and administrators "on the same

page." Most important, the decision to move to the basal was made in the context of stable leadership, coherence in professional development, commitment, and — perhaps as a result — a sense of community.

Costs and Funding

No information on costs and funding is available at this time.

Contact Information

No contact information is available at this time.

Rating Criteria

In order to ensure the inclusion of an accurate representation of schools statewide, this study employed a two-tiered selection process. First, all schools were sorted into three clusters based on school size, school diversity, community size, community SES, and "degree of 'rurality'." Schools were then sorted based on their second graders' performance on the Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment test and their fourth graders' performance on the basic understanding and analysis/interpretation portions of the New Standards Reference Examination. From within each cluster, two schools with at least 80% of their second and fourth graders' performing at the state standard were selected.

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Students can attain high levels of literacy when school staff work together toward a shared vision and have genuine respect for each other.

Naples School

Naples Elementary School

Naples, VT

School Type: Public

**School
Setting:** Suburban

Level: Elementary

**School
Design:** Traditional

Content Presented By:

University of Vermont



The Education Alliance at Brown
University



Naples is adjacent to a densely populated college town and urban center. Its elementary school, which educates 300 students, is somewhat larger and more well-resourced than many others in Vermont. The newly renovated, 100-year old building is surrounded by woods, the village green, town offices, and the requisite country store.

The town has a history of high achievement, and community members hold values and beliefs in line with their higher socioeconomic status. Residents are literate, families read often with children, families and children have books, families are interested in their children's education, and parents participate in the life of the school. To a degree, staff at Naples School attribute students' high performance to the children's innate abilities and/or their educated, upper-income families. Naples has a long tradition of a clear and deeply embedded view of what it means to be literate and well educated. The principal of 20+ years and the librarian were strong leaders in hiring and training staff and in inculcating these values. They inspired the vision of reading as a way of living in a classical sense, with books and thinking as the essence of existence.

The staff of Naples School began to look more seriously at their language arts curriculum in the late 1980s. They wanted to increase the coordination of their language arts program across and within grades, increase communication among teachers, and include more intentional word-level instruction in their literacy program. The impetus for change came from a problem of redundancy regarding topical units of study from one year to the next, as well as the need to increase teacher communication within and across grades. Also, some concern about spelling and mechanics at the upper elementary level had been voiced by parents.

An outside consultant was hired to do an inventory of the language arts program and to make recommendations for improving the program. In 1995 it adopted and began implementing a new written language arts curriculum. This was developed to reduce redundancy, facilitate communication among teachers within and across grade levels, increase explicit word-level instruction and reflect local norms and expectations for learning and teaching.

As a result of the process described above, Naples maintained its strong vision of literacy and learning and began to "fine tune" some aspects of teaching and communication. The curriculum identified specific genre studies and books for each grade level for "read-aloud" and discussion groups. To

facilitate communication, the schedule was revised to include regular meetings within and across grade levels.

Today, Naples devotes large amounts of time to reading. Uninterrupted, sustained, silent reading (commonly known as USSR) is a ritual in all classrooms. Students do silent reading for approximately 60 minutes per day at Naples. In addition, it is a strong tradition that teachers at Naples read aloud to their students daily for approximately 40 minutes per day; the new language arts curriculum requires that teachers read aloud to children daily for a minimum of 30 minutes. Children at Naples also utilize the school library two times per week for approximately 30 minutes, again to read and browse for books. Children visit the library one other time to meet with the librarian for ongoing genre/author discussions. Aside from the 15 minute per day word-level work (primarily in spelling), students predominantly read and appreciate literature and read extensively in their subject area studies.

Children self select literature and read continually, and teachers give one-to-one support and instruction as needed. There are occasionally small groups formed by ability in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades. At the 4th and 5th grades there is no ability grouping for reading, although occasionally small, heterogeneous book groups are formed. Group work for skill development is a rare occurrence.

Early on, the choice was made at Naples to build programs at the classroom level that were highly individualized, literature-based, and relied on the teacher's knowledge and expertise. Given the demographic context, this choice may be the flip side of the basal choice. Naples, from a position of strength and stability, is able to rely on its strongest resources to develop a program consistently individual and progressive across the grades. These resources include a faculty that has been cultivated for particular attributes through the hiring practices of a longtime principal, a high SES community, and a liberal, charismatic leadership. That school staff make time for reading and that they do, according to one teacher, "strongly value people who are well-educated in a traditional liberal education," appear to be paying off for everyone.

Demographics

Naples is adjacent to a densely populated college town and urban center. Its K-6 school, which educates 300 students, is somewhat larger and more well-resourced than many schools in Vermont. The newly renovated, 100-year old building is surrounded by woods, the village green, town offices and the requisite country store.

The residents of Naples have education and income levels that exceed the state average, with 89% having advanced schooling beyond a high school diploma, 12.6% holding only a high school diploma, and 8.7% holding no high school diploma. One administrator describes the town as "a culturally rich community." With respect to class, race, and ethnicity, the community is relatively homogeneous: primarily middle and upper middle class, anglo, English speaking, and U.S. born citizens.

Background

Naples has had a history of high achievement, and the community holds values and beliefs in line with residents' socioeconomic status. The town's citizens are literate, families read often with children, families and children have books, families are interested in their children's education, and parents participate in the life of the school. To a degree, staff at Naples School attribute students' high performance to the children's innate abilities and/or the educated, upper-income families.

The staff of Naples School began looking more seriously at their language arts curricula in the late 1980s. They wanted to increase the coordination of their language arts program across and within

grades, increase communication among teachers, and include more intentional work level instruction in their literacy program.

Design & Implementation

The impetus for change at Naples comes from a problem of redundancy of topical units of study from one year to the next and the need to increase teacher communication within and across the grades. Also, some concern about spelling and mechanics at the upper elementary level was voiced by parents. Naples has a long tradition of a clear and deeply embedded view of what it means to be literate and well-educated.

The principal of 20+ years and the librarian were strong leaders in hiring and training staff and in inculcating these values. They inspired the vision of reading as a way of living in a classical sense, with books and thinking as the essence of existence. Administrators and teachers consistently focus on extensive reading of high quality literature and reading as an important life activity. At the same time, unique teaching styles are celebrated. The principal hired intelligent people with specific areas of expertise who believed in learning through active engagement. Nearly all of the teachers have undergraduate degrees in the liberal arts; licensure was achieved by enrolling in an internship-based program.

Naples, working from a stable school environment, built on the perception of the teachers' autonomy and expertise. The school has constructed an individualized, self-selected reading program which is based in literature. The teachers offer unique teaching styles and expertise. The nature of literacy instruction in Naples is shaped by a balanced literacy curriculum, including non-overlapping literature units and systematic attention to skills.

Naples School hired an outside consultant to do an inventory of the language arts program and to make recommendations for improving the program. In 1995 it adopted and began implementing a new written language arts curriculum. These curricula were developed to reduce redundancy, facilitate communication among teachers within and across grade levels, increase explicit word level instruction, and reflect local norms and expectations for learning and teaching.

Teachers and administrators established teams and regular meeting times in the teachers' schedules for bi-weekly team and grade level meetings. The librarian, as the literature/literacy leader in the building, led the way in supporting the teachers with the new arrangement of literature units in the new curriculum. The concern about spelling skills was addressed by a team of teachers and special educators who took a course and then developed their own phonological awareness program for first grade and a word level program for grades 2 and 3. They have also offered to go into other classrooms to help introduce these materials. Over the past few years they have been invited into all the primary grade classrooms. At this point, all teachers talk about using these "home grown" programs or an adaptation. Similar materials are collected for the 4th and 5th grades.

Results

At least 80% of Naples' second and fourth graders are performing at the state standard on the Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment and New Standards Reference Examination Reading Subtests, as administered in the Spring of 1998. Also, as a result of the process described above, Naples maintained its strong vision of literacy and learning and began to "fine tune" some aspects of its teaching and communication. The curriculum identified specific genre studies and books for each grade level for read aloud and discussion groups. To facilitate communication, the schedule was revised to include regular meetings within and across grade levels.

Replication Details

At the Naples School, the choice had been made early on to build programs at the classroom level that were highly individualized, literature-based, and that relied on the teacher's knowledge and expertise. Given the demographic context, this choice may be the flip side of the basal choice. Naples, from a position of strength and stability, is able to rely on its strongest resources to develop a program consistently individual and progressive across the grades. These resources include a faculty that has been cultivated for particular attributes through the hiring practices of a longtime principal, a high SES community, and a liberal, charismatic leadership.

Costs and Funding

Contact Information

Rating Criteria

In order to ensure the inclusion of an accurate representation of schools statewide, this study employed a two-tiered selection process. First, all schools were sorted into three clusters based on schools size, school diversity, community size, community SES, and "degree of 'rurality'." Schools were then sorted based on their second graders' performance on the Vermont Developmental Reading Assessment test and their fourth graders' performance on the basic understanding and analysis/interpretation portions of the New Standards Reference Examination. From within each cluster, two schools with at least 80% of their second and fourth graders performing at the state standard were selected.

This story exemplifies the following practices:

Students can attain high levels of literacy when time is dedicated to literacy instruction and to exposure to literacy.

Related Web Resources

This is an annotated list of resources found on other Web sites that relate to this spotlight topic on The Knowledge Loom. We encourage you to access them from the links provided on The Knowledge Loom. To do this, go to the Web address noted in the header. Then click on the Related Resources link.

For an overview of additional content presented on The Knowledge Loom Web site that may not have been selected for this print document, see the Spotlight Overview located earlier in the document.

1) Compact for Reading

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/CompactforReading/>

Includes information on creating compacts among families and educators to help K–3 children improve their reading skills; includes a guide for creating community and family–school partnerships. The site also includes a link to School–Home Links Readings Kits — research–based activities for families to do with K–3 children to help them improve their reading abilities.

2) Building Bridges: The Mission and Principles of Professional Development

<http://www.ed.gov/G2K/bridge.html>

A brochure that identifies the ten principles of high–quality professional development derived from the best available research and exemplary practice. These principles are intended to help inform practitioners and policymakers and guide the Department's work in professional development.

3) Building Reading Proficiency at the Secondary Level: A Guide to Resources

<http://www.sedl.org/pubs/reading16/>

With the goal of building a guide to resources, this publication reviews the scholarly literature to determine: (a) current theoretical perspectives and research findings on building reading proficiency at the secondary level and (b) their implications for classroom instruction. Rather than reporting all the factors that can impact secondary–level reading proficiency, the publication presents those for which a research base establishes essential importance and for which there are pedagogical implications. Programs and strategies that align with those findings are described. Available free online in these formats: full text, PDF, searchable database

4) America Goes Back to School: Steps to Building Local Partnerships

http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/steps_part.html

Citizens of a community need to work together to build better schools. When community members "buy–in" or feel ownership of their schools, good things happen. In this resource suggestions are given for how community members can work together, access needs, survey resources, share information, seek out experienced collaborators, set goals, and decide upon measures of success.

5) America Goes Back to School: Worksheet for Planning Local Partnerships

http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/plan_worksheet.html

Planning is important as members of a community begin to work together to establish better schools. This resource offers a sample worksheet to get this planning started. Links are provided to additional school/community partnership information.

6) Developmental Characteristics of Children: Birth – 11 years

<http://www.nccc.org/Child.Dev/age.stage.page.html>

In order to determine student needs for literacy instruction, teachers need to be aware of developmental characteristics and what is age–appropriate when designing learning experiences. Presented by the Cooperative Extension System's National Network for Child Care.

7) ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education. Reading: the First Chapter In Education. (1996)

<http://www.cec.sped.org/ericec/frstchap.htm>

No other skill taught in school and learned by school children is more important than reading. It is the gateway to all other knowledge. If children do not learn to read efficiently, the path is blocked to every subject they encounter in their school years.

8) Tip Sheets for Finding and Serving Children Who Most Need Help in Reading. America Reads Challenge.

http://www.ed.gov/inits/americareads/resourcekit/miscdocs/Tip_Sheets.html

A central goal of America Reads Challenge sites is to serve children who most need help in reading. These children can include Title I children, children with disabilities, linguistically and culturally diverse children, migrant children, and preschool children. This site provides tip sheets on finding and serving these children, so that they, especially, can benefit from participation in an America Reads Challenge Site.

9) Statement on Phonemic Awareness: International Reading Association

http://www.reading.org/downloads/positions/ps1025_phonemic.pdf

Summary of a position statement of the International Reading Association: Phonemic Awareness and the Teaching of Reading. Full text of the International Reading Association position statement, Phonemic Awareness and the Teaching of Reading is available online at this address.

10) ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education. Principles for Learning to Read

<http://www.cec.sped.org/ericcc/principle.htm>

Principles for Learning How to Read: Create Appreciation for the Written Word; Develop Awareness of Printed Language; Learn the Alphabet; Understand the Relation of Letters and Words; Understand That Language is Made of Words, Syllables, and Phonemes; Learn Letter Sounds; Sound Out New Words; Identify Words in Print Accurately and Easily; Know Spelling Patterns; Learn to Read Reflectively.

11) Tips for Teachers Who Want to Encourage Reading

<http://www.cec.sped.org/ericcc/ttips.htm>

Reading is the single most important educational skill your students will learn. Understanding the organization and meaning of text and instruction in both phonics and literature is essential to helping young children read. By understanding the prerequisite skills for reading, teachers can build a solid foundation for their students to learn and succeed in school.

12) Helping Teachers Through High–Quality Professional Development

<http://www.ed.gov/inits/teachers/development.html>

Teachers need on–going, sustained opportunities to develop knowledge and skills to teach all children effectively. New education goals and tougher standards, more rigorous assessments, site–based management, greater interest in parental involvement, greater student diversity, and expanded use of technology all increase the knowledge and skills that teaching demands.

13) Helping Teachers Teach Well: Transforming Professional Development. (1995). CPRE Policy Briefs.

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/CPRE/t61/index.html>

This issue of CPRE Policy Briefs reviews what is known about professional development—where it

is now, and where it needs to be. The brief discusses its organization, costs, and effects on practice. It also suggests some principles to guide professional development in the future and offers a framework for designing and assessing policies and programs. CPRE Policy Briefs are published occasionally by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education. The Consortium operates two separate, but interconnected research centers: The Policy Center and The Finance Center. CPRE is funded by the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research.

14) The Early Literacy Advisor: An assessment system that shapes instruction
<http://www.mcrel.org/resources/literacy/ela/index.asp>

Developmentally appropriate practice is a matter of applying the right technique at the right time, and for the right length of time, based on a child's unique strengths and weaknesses. The ELA helps a teacher make these determinations.

15) Children's Speech and Language Developmental Milestones
<http://www.geocel.com/communicate/develop.html>

Adapted from the Speech and Language Development Chart – Second Edition," by Addy Gard, Leslea Gilman, and Jim Gorman (1993), PRO–ED, Inc.

16) Improving the Reading Achievement of America's Children
<http://www.ciera.org/ciera/information/principles/principles.html>

10 Research–Based Principles for Student Achievement from CIERA, Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (1998).

17) America Goes Back to School: Recruiting and Preparing Quality Teachers
<http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/teachers.html>

Includes related facts, model programs, and resources from the U.S. Department of Education.

18) America Goes Back to School: Suggested Planning Calendar
<http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/calendar.html>

Planning an event takes time and energy, especially when it is in connection with a year–round partnership. To make it easier—for you and everyone else—develop a timeline. This suggested template will help.

19) America Goes Back to School: Publicity About Your Partnership
<http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/news.html>

Suggestions for enlisting the support of celebrities, local officials, and businesses; publicizing your event; developing informational materials and activities.

20) Tips for Parents to Encourage Reading
<http://www.cec.sped.org/ericec/ptips.htm>

A list of ways in which parents can encourage the development of the skills needed by children in order for them to become good readers.

21) The Early Literacy Advisor: Standards and Benchmarks in Early Literacy

<http://www.mcrel.org/resources/literacy/ela/assessment.asp>

This set of benchmarks can be used by teachers to determine where children are in their literacy development and what to expect next.

22) Excellent Reading Teachers: Position Statement Summary of the International Reading Association (2000).

<http://www.reading.org/positions/excellent.html>

Every child deserves excellent reading teachers because teachers make a difference in children's reading achievement and motivation to read. Lists critical qualities of knowledge and practice, and provides URL for free download of full position statement.

23) Teaching Reading IS Rocket Science: What Expert Teachers of Reading Should Know and Be Able To Do

<http://www.aft.org/edissues/rocketscience.htm>

Thanks to new scientific research—plus a long-awaited scientific and political consensus around reading research—the knowledge exists to teach all but a handful of severely disabled children to read well. This report discusses the current state of teacher preparation in reading. It reviews the reading research and describes the knowledge base that is essential for teacher candidates and practicing teachers to master if they are to be successful in teaching all children to read well. Finally, this report from the American Federation of Teachers makes recommendations for improving the system of teacher education and professional development.

24) America Goes Back to School: Steps to Building Local Partnerships

http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/steps_part.html

Work Together. Assess Needs. Survey Resources. Share Information. Seek Out Experienced Collaborators. Set Goals. Decide on Measures of Success.

25) America Goes Back to School: Worksheet for Planning Local Partnerships

http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/plan_worksheet.html

Practical planning worksheet lists information needed, contacts, things to consider when developing community partnerships.

26) America Goes Back to School: Following Up on Your Partnership

<http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/followup.html>

After you have successfully launched an America Goes Back to School event, it is critical that you follow up on your efforts.

27) Checklist of Community Resources for Partnerships

<http://www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads/resourcekit/miscdocs/commresmodel.html>

The first checklist identifies the many partners in the community who can help provide resources for America Reads Challenge sites. The second checklist links the specific activities of sites with specific partners.

28) A Compact for Learning: An Action Handbook for Family–School–Community Partnerships

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Compact/>

This Partners' Activity Guide can help stimulate thinking and discussion about how we can work together to improve our schools. It was designed for schools, communities, and partners who are participating in the "America Goes Back to School" effort.

29) America Goes Back to School: Activity and Event Suggestions for Partnering

<http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/activity.html>

The purpose is to celebrate community partnerships for learning, to build public awareness of and support for your education improvement efforts, and to celebrate all the opportunities a new school year offers.

30) America Goes Back to School: Ideas for Long-term Partnerships

<http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/longterm.html>

These efforts are challenging—they take time, planning, and coordination—but they are definitely worth the investment. Children benefit from the extra attention, and often show academic growth and achievement as a result. Below are some ideas on how to make better education everybody's business in your community.

31) America Goes Back to School: Involving Students as Partners

<http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts/involvingstudents.html>

Involving students in America Goes Back to School activities is a great way to build community support and broaden the impact of your efforts. Students will add energy and ideas to your project, and you can provide them with the challenging experience of organizing a community event.

32) Simple Things You Can Do To Help All Children Read Well and Independently by the End of the Third Grade

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/SimpleThings/title.html>

Simple things families, child care providers, school, librarians, grandparents, seniors, concerned citizens, community, cultural and religious groups, universities, employers and media can do to help students read independently and well.

33) Tools for Schools: School Reform Models Supported by the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ToolsforSchools/sem.html>

The Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students supports the development of research-based knowledge and strategies promoting excellence and equity in the education of children and youth placed at risk of educational failure. Many of the research programs supported by the Institute have included the development, expansion, adaptation, evaluation, or analysis of components of school reform models.

34) Simple Things Schools Can Do to Help

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/SimpleThings/schools.html>

Suggestions for teachers, administrators, and staff to lead the implementation of reading programs in schools.

35) The Early Literacy Advisor: Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Literacy
<http://www.mcrel.org/resources/ela/practices.asp>

Developmentally appropriate practice is a matter of applying the right technique at the right time, and for the right length of time, based on a child's unique strengths and weaknesses. The ELA helps a teacher make these determinations.

Content Providers

This is an annotated list of organizations that provided content for this topic on The Knowledge Loom.

1) The Education Alliance at Brown University

The Education Alliance, a department at Brown University, has been working to effect real change in education for more than 25 years. The organization helps schools and school districts provide equitable opportunities for all students to succeed. It applies research findings and develops solutions to problems in such areas as school change, secondary school restructuring, professional development, first and second language acquisition, educational leadership, and cultural and linguistic diversity.

2) RMC Research Corporation

For more than 25 years, RMC Research Corporation has worked with agencies, institutions, schools, foundations, and corporations whose missions involve learning. A private professional service business with offices in New Hampshire, Colorado, Virginia, and Oregon, RMC Research delivers technical assistance, conducts research, and develops, evaluates, and disseminates quality programs. The people of RMC Research are committed to the growth and success of their clients and the power of constructive action through learning.

3) University of Vermont

The University of Vermont has conducted research on characterizing both the conditions and practices used to attain high levels of performance in literacy in Vermont elementary schools with different demographics. This research was supported by the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, working in collaboration with the University of Vermont to address educational reform issues in Vermont.

