# The Florida Senate

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Committee on Education Pre-K - 12

## REVIEW THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOL DISTRICT PRACTICES FOR READING INTERVENTION IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS WHERE A MAJORITY OF STUDENTS ARE READING BELOW GRADE LEVEL

## Issue Description

Florida's reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) suggest that literacy achievement for the state's secondary students begins to diminish at the middle grades and falls substantially during the high school years. In a knowledge-based economy driven by increasing demands for literacy and writing skills, fewer options will be available to young people who lack these skills.[1]

The state has successfully implemented research-based reading programs at the elementary level. However, reading interventions for struggling readers and the overall enhancement of literacy skills for all students may need to be revisited to better prepare them for the global economy. Based on the FCAT achievement results, it appears that while Florida's efforts have produced success at K-4, these improvements have not resulted in increased systemic achievement among middle and high school students. This trend is not exclusive to Florida.[2]

Based on a growing body of reading research, it appears that a wealth of information is currently available in terms of successful practices for struggling readers as well as methods to increase skills for grade-level and proficient readers.[3] In particular, these struggling readers may be helped by replicating successful instructional practices in schools that consistently improve learning gains, focusing professional development opportunities for teachers on teaching literacy skills, emphasizing literacy at the prekindergarten level, and increasing effective instructional time in reading strategies for certain struggling readers.

## Background

Kindergarten through grade 3 students are tasked primarily with learning how to read and are exposed for the most part to narrative or story-based text. Beginning in grade four, however, students are challenged with rapidly accelerating literacy demands that involve progressively more demanding vocabulary and comprehension skills, based on text that is predominantly expository, or informational, in nature.

Florida has provided substantial human resources and financial investment to increase students' reading skills, with a focus on a solid literacy foundation at the early elementary grades. The Just Read, Florida! Office (JRF) was established in 2001 with the goal of every child being able to read at or above grade level by the year 2012. JRF has focused on professional development and reading endorsements for educators and improving overall

[1] Between 1996 and 2006, the average literacy required for all American occupations is projected to rise by 14 percent. The 25 fastest growing professions have far greater than average literacy demands, while the 25 fastest declining professions have lower than average literacy demands. *What Jobs Require, 1940-2006*, Paul E. Barton. Compared to ten years ago, significantly fewer adults demonstrate the skills necessary to perform complex and challenging literacy activities. *The Condition of Education in Brief 2005*, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, available at http://nces.ed.gov/Pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005095.

[2] *Reading Next, A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy, A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*, Alliance for Excellent Education, p. 10, available at http://www.all4ed.org/files/ReadingNext.pdf.

[3] *Id.*

literacy in Florida through parent, community, and corporate involvement.[4] The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) was subsequently established in January, 2002 to further Florida's commitment to literacy. Jointly administered at Florida State University by the Learning Systems Institute and the College of Arts and Sciences, FCRR conducts applied research to facilitate the transfer of research findings into instructional practices in Florida's classrooms. Based on feedback from Florida's teachers and the results of several research studies, FCRR and JRF have collaborated to develop the Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR), available to K- 12 public schools free of charge. The FAIR assessment system was developed to provide Florida's teachers with screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring information essential to guiding literacy instruction in both reading and mathematics.

The FAIR assessment is computer administered in grades 3-12 to assess literacy standards in K-12, monitor student progress, and provide for automatic reporting to the Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network (PMRN).[5] Student reading diagnostics are linked to Florida curriculum standards and will provide information to teachers for guiding instruction. Available to all schools in fall 2009, the FAIR assessment is mandatory for Reading First schools and for purposes of kindergarten readiness. Results of the assessment will predict end-of-year performance on standardized tests for K-2 students and FCAT performance for students in grades 3-11. The primary-grade assessments included in FAIR are enhanced to include Pre-K students, and expanded to assess vocabulary, and reading comprehension. FAIR assessment for K-2 will be administered via an internet-based application linked to the PMRN.

*Current Practices at the Secondary Level*

A review of school district comprehensive reading plans reflects that most secondary schools rely on reading intervention for struggling readers outside of the content area classroom settings.[6] Additionally, most districts depend primarily on purchased intervention programs that are vetted by FCRR and JRF and include a professional development component for teachers.[7] Secondary schools also rely heavily on reading coaches who are tasked with supporting intervention strategies used by reading teachers. The Rand Corporation conducted a research study of Florida's middle school coaches in relation to increased literacy achievement and cited concerns relative to allocation of reading coaches' time to content area reading instruction.[8]

## Findings and/or Conclusions

In the past, it was widely accepted that the teaching of reading was primarily the task of elementary teachers. Based on this accepted practice, coupled with the rapidly accelerating literacy demands at the secondary level, it was not unusual to find that secondary teachers feel inadequately prepared to support students' literacy skills within their academic content areas.[9]

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[4] To date, over 30,000 teachers statewide have attended Just Read, Florida! reading academies to learn the latest in scientifically-based reading research. Federal and state grants have also provided for over 2,000 reading coaches in K-12 schools. Beginning in 2003, Florida was awarded $300 million over six years in Reading First funds, the reading component of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Reading First funding provides professional development, teacher materials, reading coaches, and classroom library improvement. Reading First in Florida is operational in 583 schools in 45 school districts, and is used by 14,000 educators with over 320,000 students. Information concerning Reading First in Florida is available at http://www.justreadflorida.com/about.asp.

[5] The PMRN is a data management system hosted by the Florida Center for Reading Research. The reports generated by the PMRN can be used to plan reading instruction and to evaluate progress toward achieving Florida's goal of No Child Left Behind. Information concerning PMRN is available at https://pmrn.fcrr.org/PMRNWeb/PMRN/.

[6] District reading plans are available at https://app1.fldoe.org/Reading_Plans/.

[7] A review of district middle and high school interventions reflect that most use purchased programs such as Read 180, and SRA Corrective Reading. Information concerning these intervention programs is available at http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/read180/research/ and https://www.sraonline.com/products.html?tid=9&sid=2713, respectively.

[8] *Florida's Middle School Reading Coaches*, the Rand Corporation, available at http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9374/index1.html.

[9] *Supporting Adolescent Literacy Achievement*, The National Governors Association, p. 4, available at http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0902ADOLESCENTLITERACY.PDF.

Reading on grade level by third grade is not sufficient for preparing students for success in high school and beyond. Without attention to continuing literacy instruction and supports beyond third grade, policymakers will squander extensive investments in early literacy acquisition. The focus on early literacy acquisition must be complemented by ongoing attention to reading instruction in grades four and five, content-area literacy skills in grades six through twelve, and effective, targeted interventions for students falling behind at any point in their literacy development.[10]

Struggling readers at the upper elementary and secondary levels are often capable of reading fluently (reading words accurately) but for several different reasons, cannot comprehend what they read.[11] For some students, the problem is that they do not yet read words with enough fluency to facilitate comprehension. Others can read accurately and quickly enough for comprehension to take place, but they lack the strategies to help them comprehend what they read. Reading comprehension strategies in successful readers include the ability to grasp the general idea of a text, to be aware of and able to internally correct misinterpretations, and to modify comprehension tactics based on the purposes of reading. Other struggling readers may have learned these strategies but have difficulty using them because they have only practiced using them with a limited range of texts (literature) and in a limited range of circumstances (stand-alone intervention classes). Of greatest significance, secondary students often lack instruction in and knowledge of strategies specific to particular subject areas, such as math, science, or history.[12]

Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are highly interdependent skills.[13] Because each academic content area has a distinct language or vocabulary, secondary level text presents students with a unique and often demanding vocabulary, and even familiar words take on different meanings in other content areas.[14] In order to navigate secondary level text, students must be provided opportunities to expand their vocabulary and learn the language of individual academic disciplines to support comprehension in content area text. Secondary content area educators must learn to facilitate student vocabulary skills. This involves both targeted vocabulary instruction germane to a given academic discipline and teaching students the skills to recognize the origins of root words, referred to as morphemic analysis, which will allow them to increase their vocabulary independently.[15]

Most secondary language arts standards and courses stress literary content, while the majority of text encountered in the workforce or at the postsecondary level is informational in nature, such as manuals, articles, briefs and essays. Florida's Next Generation Language Arts standards contain extensive vocabulary and comprehension-related benchmarks and application of these skills are embedded within the core content area courses. There is no assurance, however, that secondary teachers will incorporate these literacy skills without an understanding of their importance to student success across all academic domains. Therefore, content-area secondary teachers must be provided with professional learning opportunities that underscore the importance of these literacy skills and the transfer of such skills to their students.

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[10] State Literacy Plans: Incorporating Adolescent Literacy, Catherine Snow, et al, Harvard Review, Volume 78, Number 1, p. 211, Spring 2008.

[11] *Reading Next, A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy, A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*, Alliance for Excellent Education, available at http://www.all4ed.org/files/ReadingNext.pdf.

[12] *Id.*

[13] *Id. Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents: A Guidance Document from the Center on Instruction*, Center on Instruction at RMC Research Corporation, available at http://www.centeroninstruction.org/resources.cfm?category=reading. *Research-Based Content Area Reading Instruction*, Texas Reading Initiative, Texas Education Agency, available at http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/reading/practices/redbk4.pdf.

[14] For example, the familiar word *brush* will have different meanings in art and geography texts. The word *ruler* will mean different things in math and social studies texts. Technical vocabulary includes words that relate specifically to each content area or topic, e.g. *photosynthesis*. Research studies associated with content-area vocabulary can be found in *Reading in the Disciplines, The Challenges of Adolescent Literacy*, Carol D. Lee and Anika Spratley, Northwestern University, available at http://carnegie.org/literacy/tta/pdf/tta_Lee.pdf.

[15] *Research-Based Content Area Reading Instruction*, Texas Reading Initiative, Texas Education Agency, available at http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/reading/practices/redbk4.pdf.

**Beating the Odds for Struggling Readers**

The findings addressed in the publication, *Annual Growth, Catch-Up Growth*, are of particular significance to practices associated with struggling readers at the secondary level.[16] The book is based on substantial student learning gains that resulted from mastery-oriented instruction for struggling readers in the Kennewick School District, Kennewick, Washington, where virtually all students were brought up to grade level in reading by the third grade. The Most Effective Schools Campaign,[17] which underwrote this research, refers to this as "a level of accomplishment that has not been heard of for decades." The study reinforces research that students, who are equipped with the reading skills necessary for success in grades four through eight, are much more likely to be prepared for college or the workplace. Key findings in the study include the following:

- On the first day of kindergarten, the range between students in the bottom and top quartile midpoints is six years in reading skills and four years in math. All of the achievement gap in reading and 67 percent of the gap in math originates in the home before a student's first day of kindergarten. Public schools do not create this achievement gap.
- Annual growth (a year's worth of progress for each year of instruction) is fairly uniform during elementary school. Annual growth, however, is less uniform in middle and high school. Only 62 percent of students make annual growth in math in grades 6-8.
- Students who are behind need to achieve catch-up growth. Catch-up growth is annual growth plus some additional part of a year's growth.
- Most school districts spend twice as much per student per year on students who need remediation. Catch-up growth in public schools is very expensive and historically unsuccessful. Fostering annual academic growth in emergent reading and math skills is five to ten times less expensive from birth to age five than in grades K-5.
- In order to obtain catch-up growth, schools would need to do the following: (1) diagnostic testing to identify skill deficiencies, (2) dramatically increasing direct instructional time and using it wisely, (3) teaching to the skill deficiencies, and (4) retesting to be sure the skill has been learned.
- Catch-up growth is rarely achieved by pressuring students who are behind to "run faster" in the same amount of time. Catch-up growth is typically achieved by allowing them to "run longer" and "run smarter," i.e., dramatically increasing direct instructional time and using it wisely. The primary driver of catch-up growth is increased instructional time. This is true in math as well as reading. Students who are three years behind at the end of kindergarten may require 160 to 220 minutes of direct reading instructional time each day during first, second, and third grades to catch up by third grade.
- Calculations of direct instructional time should not include practice time, silent sustained reading, spelling instruction or time spent reading in the content area. The research shows that silent sustained reading improves the abilities of students who already read well but results in very little improvement for those who do not read at grade level.
- By implementing appropriate scheduling, principals can double or triple the amount of direct instructional time for students who need targeted instruction in a single semester. Doubling instructional effectiveness generally requires several years of staff training and experience. Middle and high schools are run from equal time-based master schedules and, unfortunately, most middle and high school administrators understand increased instructional time in terms of additional classes.

**Progress of Florida's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK)**

A commitment to annual academic growth in emergent reading and math skills is five to ten times less expensive from birth to age five than in grades K-5.[18] Florida's VPK program[19] has responded to this issue by developing comprehensive professional learning for early childhood providers and educators aimed at preparing young

[16] *Annual Growth, Catch-Up Growth*, The Most Effective Schools Campaign, Education Consumers Foundation, available at http://www.mosteffectiveschools.org/sch/kennewick.htm.

[17] Information on the Most Effective Schools Campaign is available at http://www.mosteffectiveschools.org.

[18] Enriching Children, Enriching the Nation: Public Investment in High-Quality Prekindergarten, Robert G. Lynch, available at http://www.epi.org/publications/entry/book_enriching/.

[19] The Department of Education Office of Early Learning, the Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) work in collaboration to implement Florida's VPK program.

children for kindergarten.[20] The Department of Children and Families' website provides access to VPK educators to research-based learning opportunities that have been developed jointly with the Department of Education (DOE).[21] This professional development is aligned to research conducted by the National Early Learning Panel and focuses primarily on emergent literacy skills for young children.[22] The DOE Office of Early Learning was poised to offer additional online and face-to-face training in emergent mathematical skills; however, this initiative was delayed due to budget constraints.[23]

**Florida Assessment and Intervention for Reading (FAIR)**

In August, the Florida Department of Education made available new Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) to K-12 public schools. The FAIR assessment system was developed jointly by the Florida Center for Reading Research and Just Read, Florida!, to provide teachers with screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostic information essential to guiding instruction in reading. The FAIR Assessment also includes Bright Beginnings,[24] a kindergarten readiness component for Florida's VPK Program. These assessments are designed to inform instruction and are administered individually by the child's classroom teacher at the beginning, middle, and end of the year for the purpose of measuring the child's progress, diagnosing learning needs, setting instructional goals, and monitoring instructional progress. The VPK Assessments in reading include screening and monitoring measures in print knowledge, phonological awareness, and vocabulary.

**Comparing Florida's FCAT Reading Proficiency Levels to Those of Nationally Standardized Achievement Tests**

The current bar at which 3rd grade reading levels are set may not be appropriate. There is evidence that suggests that the standard (relative to average reading levels across the entire country) for FCAT Level 3 (performance at level 3 is considered to be on grade-level) in third grade is set at a much different level of competence than the standard for 10th grade. In terms of the distribution of reading competency across the nation, Florida's standard for Level 3 performance is much higher in 10th grade compared to the expected standard for Level 3 performance in 3rd grade. To illustrate, the 2005-2006 Level 3 performance on the FCAT corresponded to performance at the 36th percentile on the SAT10[25] in 3rd grade, but to the 80th percentile in the 10th grade. It could be argued that Florida's standard for Level 3 performance is not set too high in 10th grade, but rather that students nationally are scoring at a lower rate in the 10th grade. Since average readers in 10th grade are often not ready for the reading demands beyond high school, this argument has some merit. However, the FCAT standard seems to suggest that the state intends for its schools and students to perform at a higher reading level than the national norm in 10th grade, while allowing students to perform at a lower level than their national counterparts in the 3rd grade. Both the current director and the director emeritus of the FCRR state that this disparity in expectations is the best single reason for the precipitous decline in the percent of students at grade level on the FCAT from middle to high school. If Florida is performing commensurately with the rest of the nation in reading at the 3rd and 10th grade, as suggested by the NAEP results, defining grade level performance on the FCAT as equivalent to the 80th percentile in 10th grade and the 36th percentile in 3rd grade (on a national test) would produce a dramatic drop in the percentage of students performing at grade level from the 3rd to 10th grade.[26] While this appears to be a critical factor within overall literacy achievement, it must be addressed in the context of the importance of Pre-K literacy at the front end and a commitment that continues beyond grade 4 and through high school. This would include a continuation of the teaching of reading skills in grades four and five, aggressively targeting content area reading in grades six through twelve, and providing systematic, proven interventions to all struggling readers. Without this

[20] This professional development is voluntary for providers and educators but provides continuing education units necessary for continued credentialing.

[21] Providers can enroll in child care training through https://training01-dcf.myflorida.com/dcf/cct/reg/courseselector.

[22] Memorandum #09-03, February 24, 2009, Department of Education, available at http://info.fldoe.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-5325/dps-2009-029.pdf. Florida's VPK curriculum standards can be accessed at http://www.fldoe.org/earlylearning/pdf/vpk-standards-brochure.pdf.

[23] The Office of Early Learning estimates it would cost approximately $50,000 to provide the mathematics training.

[24] Information concerning Bright Beginnings is available at http://www.brightbeginningsfl.com/Default.aspx.

[25] Stanford Achievement Test (10th edition) is a standardized multiple-choice assessment that helps educators determine student achievement for grades 3 through 12. It is a nationally norm-referenced test, which provides a comparison of student performance with that of a representative sample of students across the U.S.

[26] E-mail correspondence from Joe Torgeson, Director Emeritus, and Barbara Foorman, Director, Florida Center for Reading Research, July 13, 2009 – August 31, 2009.

comprehensive approach, it may be difficult to safeguard the substantial investment Florida has made in reading at the K-3 level.

**Seminole County - Secondary Reading Study Conducted by FCRR**[27]

The Florida Center for Reading Research recently conducted a year-long study in seven Seminole County high schools to determine the effectiveness of intensive reading interventions for struggling high school readers. The study involved four distinct intervention programs administered within science classes and all Level 1 and Level 2 readers were assigned appropriately to the high risk or moderate-risk group. The study provided all high school science teachers with professional development activities aligned to the intervention program to which they and their students were assigned.

All four interventions in the Seminole study resulted in gains that exceeded the benchmark for expected annual growth. Most significantly, the high-risk ninth-grade students in two of the interventions had learning gains that were more than double those of the state benchmark for expected annual growth.[28] While the students participating in this study made improvements of more than twice the state average, the authors acknowledged that other support or interventions may have also played a part in students' success. These may have included intensive reading instruction provided for these students in addition to that received in their science classes.

The study also found that specific interventions were more effective when used with high-risk readers while other interventions proved to be more appropriate to moderate-risk readers.[29] This finding reinforces other research studies which indicate that Level 2 readers (moderate-risk), generally have well-developed basic reading skills (fluency) but need additional instruction and support for the development of higher-level comprehension skills.[30] Irrespective of the reading gains achieved, neither the moderate- or high-risk students made gains sufficient to move them to a lower level of risk in ninth grade than they were in eighth grade. This study, and others, indicate that most students who enter high school reading substantially below grade level will require more than one year of relatively intensive reading intervention to make significant progress toward the grade-level standard in reading.[31] These studies show that it is possible to accelerate reading development in high school struggling readers so that the gap between their skills and the grade-level standard is narrowed. However, the instructional conditions that accelerate reading growth should begin as early as possible and may need to be extended across several years to close the gap.[32]

**Reading in the Content Areas – Implications for Professional Learning and Teacher Preparation**

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) in its *State Actions to Improve Adolescent Literacy* publication provides a consensus of research related to adolescent literacy and reading in the content area.[33] The research indicates that professional learning opportunities are the key to providing educators with the skills necessary to improve student literacy within core academic subjects.[34] Professional learning for secondary content teachers must address student skill development that:

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[27] *Exploring the Relative Effectiveness of Reading Interventions for High School Students*, Laura Lang, Joe Torgeson, et al, available at http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a909882985~db=all~tab=content~order=page.

[28] Annual Growth is considered one school-year of academic progress.

[29] Read 180 was associated with significant gains for Level 2 (moderate risk) readers, but with the smallest gains for Level 1 (high risk) readers.

[30] *Reading Next, A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy, A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*, Alliance for Excellent Education, available at http://www.all4ed.org/files/ReadingNext.pdf.

[31] *Reading First Impact Study by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance*, Kemple, et al, 2008. *Annual Growth, Catch-Up Growth*, The Most Effective Schools Campaign, Education Consumers Foundation, available at www.mosteffectiveschools.org/sch/kennewick.htm.

[32] In eighth grade, the average DSS score of students in one of the four interventions was 1559, which was within 137 points of Level 2 performance. After the substantial acceleration in growth achieved by students in this group during ninth grade, their average score of 1729 placed them still 43 points below the criterion for designation as moderate risk in the Level 2 category. In fact, 56 percent of the eighth-grade Level 1 students in the most effective intervention condition remained at Level 1 at the end of ninth grade.

[33] *State Actions to Improve Adolescent Literacy: Results from NASBE's State Adolescent Literacy Network*, National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), available at http://nasbe.org/index.php/saln.

[34] *Id.* (Page 5)

- Familiarizes students with the structure of expository text;[35]
- Promotes content area vocabulary development;
- Promotes word identification skills;
- Builds reading fluency; and
- Provides specific strategies to teach comprehension skills.[36]

Fortunately, each of these literacy skills is explicitly embedded within the Florida's NGSSS for language arts in grades 6-12.[37] However, in order to provide opportunities for students to transfer these skills into other content areas, teachers in each academic discipline must be informed of the importance of these skills and required to provide instruction that creates opportunities for their students to apply them. Additionally, a literacy focus must be sustained beyond grade 3, expository text must be introduced earlier in the elementary grades, and the development of vocabulary and comprehension skills within content areas must be expanded. Comprehension-related critical-thinking skills must be the standard in all academic areas.[38] These critical-thinking skills include pre- and post-reading strategies that make explicit connections to prior knowledge, ask questions, make predictions and summarize the content. The ability to monitor and deploy corrective comprehension strategies while reading is also a critical-thinking skill.

The Lexile Framework for Reading, a scientific approach to reading measurement that matches a reader to appropriately leveled text, has proved to be effective in supporting secondary literacy skills. The Lexile Framework measures reader ability to text difficulty, allowing educators to encourage reader progress and facilitate reading comprehension.[39] Secondary teachers equipped with additional literacy tools, such as the Lexile Framework, can support students to confidently pursue and expand their areas of interest through the selection of material that is both challenging and manageable in terms of difficulty.

**High-Quality Professional Learning Opportunities**

In continuing education for teachers, job-embedded professional learning opportunities are more successful than work-shop professional development in enhancing instruction.[40] Professional learning research[41] supports opportunities for teachers to meet together on a regular basis for the purposes of continuous learning, joint lesson planning, and problem solving to improve their teaching skills and advance student learning. Daily professional conversations that focus on instructional practices are the hallmark of effective learning communities. Learning teams identify practical ways to improve teaching and learning, assist one another in exploring application of the standards their students are required to master, planning more effective lessons, critiquing student work to facilitate mastery, and provide opportunities for educators to observe one another in the classroom. These

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[35] Narrative text typically follows a single general structural pattern often called story grammar. Expository text comes in a variety of patterns: description, sequence, compare-contrast, cause-effect, and problem solution. Expository texts convey and communicate factual information. This type of text generally contains more unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts and fewer ideas related to personal experience, as well as a variety of structures. Students are often not familiar with the types of text structures that are found in their expository textbooks. This unfamiliarity impedes their comprehension. Expository text is generally more difficult to comprehend due to the variety of structures and unfamiliar content. Florida Online Reading Professional Development, available at http://forpd.ucf.edu/strategies/strattextstructure.html.

[36] *Research-Based Content Area Reading Instruction*, Texas Reading Initiative, Texas Education Agency, available at http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/reading/practices/redbk4.pdf.

[37] For example, NGSSS - LA.1112.1.6.11 requires the following: The student will identify the meaning of unfamiliar terms in political science and medicine derived from Greek and Latin words (e.g., oligarchy, homeopathic). Standard LA.1112.1.7.1 requires the student to use background knowledge of subject and related content areas, pre-reading strategies (e.g., previewing, discussing, and generating questions), text features, and text structure to make and confirm complex predictions of content, purpose, and organization of a reading selection.

[38] Meeting with Dr. Joe Torgeson, Director Emeritus, Florida Center for Reading Research, August 12, 2009.

[39] Tens of thousands of books and tens of millions of articles have Lexile measures, hundreds of publishers Lexile their materials, and all major standardized tests can report student reading scores in Lexiles. Lexile Framework for Reading, available at http://www.lexile.com.

[40] *Effects of Professional Development on Teachers' Instruction: Results from a Three-year Longitudinal Study*, Laura Desimone, et al, Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Summer 2002.

[41] National Staff Development Council, available at -http://www.nsdc.org/standards/learningcommunities.cfm.

practices all serve to refine and enhance instruction to support student engagement and learning.[42] While most professional learning communities have face-to-face meetings, increasing numbers of participants use electronic means such as e-mail, listserve, and electronic bulletin boards to communicate between meetings or as a substitute for meetings. Expanding the use of technology can provide important sources of information, as well as the personal support required to transform classroom practices.[43]

**Beat the Odds Schools**

Staff requested from the DOE and FCRR student achievement data specific to schools in which low income and other high-need groups of students consistently make substantial learning gains. Schools that fall into this category are often referred to as "Beat the Odds" schools. The initial data was so remarkable that trend data going back three years at these schools was requested in an effort to substantiate findings. For example, student achievement data from these schools reflected consistent learning gains for Level 1 and Level 2 readers, the majority of whom come from low income, minority, and English language learner communities. Receipt of this longitudinal data did not allow for the time necessary to engage principals and instructional staff of these schools to determine what key practices may have led to extraordinary student achievement. Staff will continue conversations with staff from FCRR, and JRF and begin dialogue with "Beat the Odds" schools to establish whether key instructional practices in these schools may be instrumental in affecting student achievement statewide.

## Options and/or Recommendations

In an effort to address the literacy skills for struggling readers, primarily those at the secondary level, the state may wish to consider the following:

- Increasing the current standard assigned for grade-level reading achievement at 3rd grade;
- Increasing support for literacy and comprehensive curriculum initiatives for the VPK community;
- Revising teacher preparation practices and requirements for certification to parallel research findings and instructional practices learned from the Beat the Odds Schools;
- Revising professional learning opportunities for secondary teachers to focus on content-area literacy skills; and
- Increasing effective instructional time for struggling readers through appropriate master schedule changes.

[42] The terms "lesson study," "professional learning communities," and "professional learning teams" are used interchangeably. These terms are used to describe a method of long-term professional development in which teams of teachers systematically and collaboratively conduct research closely tied to lessons and then use what they learn about student thinking to become more effective instructors. The term, "lesson study," is a more comprehensive approach to professional development, in which revising and improving a lesson is one small part of the process. Lesson study is also an ongoing process that develops teachers' habits of continual self-reflection and improvement through collaboration. *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession, A Status Report on Teacher Development in the U.S. and Abroad*, Ruth Chung Wei, et. al., National Staff Development Council, available at http://www.nsdc.org/news/NSDCstudytechnicalreport2009.pdf.

[43] National Staff Development Council, available at http://www.nsdc.org/standards/learningcommunities.cfm.