TEACHING ALL STUDENTS TO READ IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Guide for Principals

CENTER ON INSTRUCTION

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CENTER ON
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INTRODUCTION

If your goal is to improve the overall quality of reading instruction in your school, this guide can help you identify the most critical changes that must be made. It describes the types of instruction and leadership activities necessary to help all children become proficient readers in elementary school. It does not contain all the information needed, but refers you to additional readings in specific areas to enrich your knowledge. Think of it as a "quick start" guide for a school-level instructional leader. It can point you in the right direction, but it can only provide a taste of the knowledge needed to be a successful literacy leader in your school. We encourage you to become familiar with the ideas in the guide, and then embark on a program of systematic study to fully prepare for this challenging and rewarding task. This guide is based on scientific research on reading and reading instruction, as well as on studies of successful schools and interviews with successful principals.

The most important goal of reading instruction in elementary school is to help students acquire the skills and knowledge they need to read grade-level text fluently and with good comprehension. Reading comprehension is a very complex skill. Its most essential elements involve:

- skill in reading text accurately and fluently;
- sufficient background knowledge and vocabulary to make sense of the content;
- skill in using reading strategies that improve understanding or repair it when it breaks down;
- ability to think and reason about the information and concepts in the text; and
- motivation to understand and learn from text.

In other words, reading proficiency at the end of elementary school requires that students be able to identify the words on the page *accurately and fluently*; that they have enough *knowledge and thinking ability* to understand the words, sentences, and paragraphs; and that they be *motivated and engaged* enough to use their knowledge and thinking ability to understand and learn from the text. We want to emphasize that motivation to understand and learn from text is a critical component of reading comprehension. It takes real effort to understand

the many textbooks and other forms of complex written materials students begin to encounter as they move through elementary school and into middle and high school. Unless students are appropriately engaged, they often do not fully apply the skills they have, nor will they be motivated to acquire additional skills and knowledge.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE READING PROGRAM IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Although the focus of reading instruction changes dramatically from the early to later grades, three program elements are critical at all grade levels:

1. ***Consistently implemented, high quality initial classroom instruction and follow-up small-group instruction that is well-differentiated according to student needs.*** Teachers at all grades must be prepared to provide strong initial instruction in critical skills and knowledge to their classroom as a whole. At every grade, specific skills must be taught and specific knowledge acquired to meet grade-level standards in reading. Teachers must be able to support student growth in critical areas through skillful, systematic, and explicit instruction at the whole classroom level; they must also be able to work effectively with small groups of students who have different instructional needs. Small-group instruction is necessary because students in most classes vary widely in their instructional needs, and their diverse needs are best met when instruction is at the right level and focused on areas of most critical need.

   Appropriately differentiated instruction involves even deeper teaching skills than whole-classroom instruction, because it requires teachers to diagnose individual needs and make appropriate adjustments to their instructional focus and instructional routines.

2. ***Use of student performance data to guide instruction and allocate instructional resources.*** Data on student performance in reading from both formal and informal assessments have two important uses in elementary schools. First, data provide valuable information to help teachers adapt instruction for individual students. Valid and reliable assessments of reading progress provide *key* information that allows teachers to target their instruction for individual students, and it also allows them to determine when further adjustments need to be made because of a lack of student progress. Second, reliable data on student progress are useful for principals in making important school-level decisions about instruction and allocation of resources, such as decisions about: a) scheduling classes, b) assigning students to classes, c) planning professional development and support for each grade level as well as

individual teachers, and d) allocating resources to support extra instruction for students who need it.

3. ***Resources to provide interventions for struggling readers.*** Even when teachers are providing excellent initial instruction and effective small-group differentiated instruction, some students' instructional needs will still not be met. In many elementary schools, the diversity of talent and preparation for learning to read is so great that some students will require *four or five times* the amount of instruction an average student requires. Some students' needs are simply too great to expect the individual teacher, by herself, to meet them. Research has shown that we must provide reading instruction for diverse groups of students along a *continuum of intensity*: some students can maintain adequate progress through whole-class instruction; others need extra assistance through differentiated support by the classroom teacher; and still others may require *substantial* additional instruction from reading intervention specialists. The principal must identify a variety of additional instructional resources to meet the needs of these students.

In a later section of this guide, we discuss leadership activities required to implement each of these elements in a school-level literacy plan. We introduce the elements here because they are the core areas of excellence found in almost all schools that have achieved success in teaching reading to diverse student populations. Successful principals employ a range of leadership styles and vary in their solutions to many specific problems, but the most successful schools consistently develop strong solutions in each of the three areas described above. Without effective initial classroom instruction and strongly differentiated instruction by classroom teachers, the need for intervention specialists may simply overwhelm school resources because too many students will not make expected yearly progress. Unless the school has a strong assessment plan and uses student data effectively in making decisions, instructional opportunities will be lost, and resources may not be allocated properly. Finally, unless strong, timely interventions are available to students who need them, significant numbers of students will continue to leave elementary school unprepared for the literacy demands of middle and high school.

The Changing Focus of Reading Instruction from Kindergarten to Late Elementary School

Dr. Jeanne Chall, a leading reading researcher and educator for many years at Harvard University, coined a phrase that is widely quoted, but often misunderstood. She pointed out that, in grades K-2, students are "learning to read," while in grades 3 and above, they are "reading to learn." While reading does become an increasingly important tool for helping students expand their knowledge after grade three, learning to read hardly comes to an abrupt halt at the end of second or third grade.

Our current understanding of reading growth indicates that students must continue to learn many new things, and acquire many additional skills, in order to maintain reading proficiency as they progress from early to late elementary school and beyond. *It is a serious mistake* to think that we can stop teaching reading after third grade—many students continue to need explicit and systematic instruction in increasingly complex skills in order to move to higher levels of reading proficiency.

Although reading instruction must be provided in all elementary grades, the focus of this instruction does change dramatically from the early to later grades. In the table below, we have identified the components of reading instruction most essential at each grade level from kindergarten through sixth grade. We offer this schematic only as an overall guide—movement through this instructional sequence might be a bit slower or a bit faster depending on the student population in any given school.

Grade	Targets of instruction and methods used for instruction
Kindergarten	• **Phonemic awareness**—Teachers use explicit instructional techniques and systematic practice to help students acquire skill in identifying the sounds (phonemes) in spoken words • **Phonics**—Systematic and explicit instruction is used to teach students the relationships between letters and the sounds they typically represent in words. Students also receive instruction and practice to help them learn how to use their knowledge of letter-sound relationships to "sound out" unfamiliar words in text. Acquiring strong word analysis/phonemic decoding skills is one of the keys to becoming an accurate and independent reader by the end of first grade. • **Learning to recognize a small set of high frequency words "by sight"**— Teachers provide repeated exposures to words that occur very frequently in kindergarten texts so that students learn to read

(continued)

Grade	Targets of instruction and methods used for instruction
	them at a single glance. This increases reading ease and fluency because these words do not have to be "sounded out." • **Vocabulary**—Teachers use a variety of techniques, from explicit instruction to incidental teaching, to expand students' vocabulary, or knowledge of the meaning of words. • **Oral language comprehension**—Teachers read stories and other kinds of text, and discuss their meaning with students to enhance the students' ability to understand both narrative and expository text. At the same time, these activities can help deepen students' interest in reading and their sense of reading as a meaningful activity.
First Grade	• **Phonics/word analysis**—First grade is a time for students to expand and deepen both the accuracy and fluency with which they can use a variety of strategies to identify unfamiliar words in text. Teachers will explicitly teach more complex phonics in first grade, and reading will move from decodable, supported texts, to texts with a much wider range of regular and irregular words. • **Fluency**—Students expand the range of words they can recognize "by sight" as they do large amounts of reading, which contributes significantly to the growth of their text-reading fluency. Most words are learned after students have read them correctly multiple times. Teacher modeling of reading in phrases and with proper expression can also help build fluency. • **Vocabulary**—Teachers use a variety of techniques, from explicit instruction to incidental teaching, to expand students' vocabulary, or knowledge of the meaning of words. Teachers often read texts to students that are beyond their current independent reading ability in order to expose them to more challenging vocabulary than they encounter in text they can read on their own. This helps prepare students for the higher levels of vocabulary they will encounter as they move into second and third grade. • **Reading Comprehension**—Teachers begin to teach specific comprehension strategies, such as the use of story structure, to help students increase their reading comprehension. They also create many opportunities for students to discuss the meaning of the text they are reading. Writing in response to reading and sharing and discussing student writing is also an important instructional technique for reading comprehension.
2nd Grade	• **Phonics/word analysis**—Students are taught more complex letter patterns, simple morphological units, and work extensively with decoding strategies for multi-syllable words • **Fluency**—Teachers encourage extensive reading and use specific methods, such as timed readings, partner reading, and reader's theater, to stimulate growth in fluency. • **Vocabulary**—Teachers continue to provide direct vocabulary instruction as well as instruction to help students learn how to infer

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Grade	Targets of instruction and methods used for instruction
	the meanings of words they encounter when they are reading. • **Reading Comprehension**—Teachers model and explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies, and provide scaffolded support for their use during reading. They also create many opportunities for students to engage in high-level discussions of the meaning of both narrative and expository text. Writing continues to be used as an aid to building reading comprehension, and also as a way of monitoring the growth of students' spelling knowledge.
3rd Grade	• **Word analysis**—Teachers continue to support the growth of students' ability to identify unfamiliar words in text through morphemic analysis and other word-reading strategies. • **Fluency**—Continued growth in students' ability to read grade-level text fluently occurs primarily as a result of large amounts of practice in reading meaningful text. • **Vocabulary**—Continued explicit and strategic instruction as in second grade. • **Reading Comprehension**—Students continue to be taught and supported in the use of reading comprehension strategies, and continue to learn how to construct the meaning of text as they participate in carefully guided discussions, both with the teacher and among themselves. Writing in response to reading continues to be an important instructional technique in this area. Although the growth of conceptual knowledge is an important support for reading comprehension from the first day of kindergarten, it becomes increasingly important that students master complex content knowledge from science, history, social studies, etc. in order to maintain their ability to comprehend increasingly difficult expository text in these areas.
4th, 5th, and 6th grades	• **Fluency**—Continued growth in students' ability to read grade-level text fluently occurs primarily as a result of large amounts of practice reading meaningful text. • **Vocabulary**—The growth of students' knowledge of word meanings continues to be supported by robust vocabulary instruction that involves explicit instruction in definitions, many opportunities to access word meanings in varied contexts, and instruction in vocabulary-learning strategies that can be applied when students encounter unknown words in text. • **Reading Comprehension**—Teachers continue to provide explicit instruction and modeling in the use of reading comprehension strategies before, during, and after reading. They also integrate reading and writing activities, both to stimulate reading comprehension and to monitor growth in students' ability to understand increasingly complex text. They continue to discuss high-level questions about text meaning, and work to create engaging situations in which students are motivated to learn from

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Grade	Targets of instruction and methods used for instruction
	text. Learning of important content (science, history, social studies, literature) is supported by a variety of effective methods for teaching, such as use of graphic organizers, routines for comparing and contrasting concepts, etc.

Although this table may be useful as an overview of the way the major components of reading instruction change across the grade levels in elementary school, it can be misunderstood in at least two important ways.

First, it might give the impression that good reading instruction involves teaching a set of separate skills that somehow merge into successful reading over time. Actually, teachers must work carefully to link all of these different kinds of skills and knowledge together as they teach. For example, students may engage in oral language activities to stimulate the growth of phonemic awareness early in kindergarten, but eventually, the teacher must show them how to combine their emerging phonemic awareness with their emerging letter knowledge to encode and decode words in print. Similarly, while students are practicing decoding individual words, the teacher should make sure that students know the meaning of the words they are reading. Finally, as students are practicing reading text in the early grades to build accuracy and fluency, they should always be reminded, through questions and discussion, that their ultimate goal is to understand the meaning of what they are reading.

The second danger with a table like this is that it may be applied too rigidly. For example, some students may continue to require explicit support for the development of phonemic awareness in first grade, and in other cases, they may require explicit support for the growth of fluency beyond third grade. The most important overall distinction in this table is between the focus of instruction in grades K-2 on knowledge and strategies that help students become accurate readers, and the shift away from this type of instruction in grades three and after for most students. The growth of reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension are important concerns from first grade through the end of elementary school. Once students have become relatively fluent in the basic skills required to read the words in text, reading instruction must focus powerfully on both maintaining fluency through extensive reading

experiences and increasing the knowledge and thinking skills required to comprehend complex text.

Interventions for struggling readers must be available in all of these critical areas of reading growth. Particularly in K-2, powerful interventions must be available to ensure the growth of word-reading accuracy and fluency so that students can begin to engage in the broad reading that is so important for the development of vocabulary, conceptual knowledge, and reading comprehension. Students who do not become accurate and independent readers by the end of first or second grade tend to read much less than other students, and they miss out on many, many hours of valuable reading practice because reading remains so difficult for them. Many students may need more intensive instruction in vocabulary from the very beginning of school and extending through elementary school because they entered school with vocabularies half the size of the average student at their grade level. Even though students with small vocabularies may learn to read accurately, they will not be prepared for difficult tests of reading comprehension in third grade and later if they do not receive effective instruction to help them close the "vocabulary gap" with average students in their classes.

CRITICAL TASKS FOR PRINCIPALS AS LITERACY LEADERS

This next section is the core of this guide. It outlines a set of tasks for principals that can have a powerful impact in creating and sustaining effective reading programs in elementary schools. These tasks might be considered a principal's "points of maximum leverage." They are ways that principals can effectively use their limited time to have the greatest influence on the quality of literacy instruction in their schools.

Providing Leadership for Effective Classroom Instruction

The goal of leadership activities in this area is to support high quality instruction in *all classrooms at each grade level.* There is no question about the effect of high quality teaching on student achievement, and every school has a number of outstanding teachers. The principal must work to increase the consistency with which high quality instruction is provided in all the classrooms in the school. A principal can have a strong impact in this area by doing three things well.

1. ***Ensuring teachers have excellent, ongoing, professional development.*** There is now considerable research showing that good professional development for teachers can have a strong impact on student performance. Further, the characteristics of effective professional development are well known. Strong professional development goes beyond single session workshops to repeated exposures in which new teaching behaviors are learned over time in the classroom. Principals can be instrumental in supporting two kinds of professional development for their teachers.
    a. The first type focuses on general principles, or techniques of effective teaching. Examples might include ways of increasing student engagement during lessons, methods for leading effective classroom discussions of text, or ways of effectively correcting student word-reading errors during shared reading activities. Teachers can receive this type of professional development through workshop series, literacy study groups, or coaching. The most effective professional development always involves follow-up in the classroom to ensure that teachers understand new instructional approaches well enough to apply them in their classrooms.

b. The second type of professional development that can lead directly to improved classroom teaching is often referred to as *program-specific professional development.* One way to improve the consistency with which high quality instruction occurs in all classrooms is to provide teachers with a published core reading program that contains systematic lessons to support the growth of critical reading skills, along with practice and teacher support activities aligned with the instruction. Too often, teachers are provided these complex core reading programs and are not given enough training to help them effectively use the materials to guide their instruction. Effective training in the use of core reading programs to guide instruction involves several days of initial training that should provide a sound basic understanding of the elements of the program, plus follow-up visits to the classroom to answer questions and perhaps model some of the instructional routines in the program. In the words of one successful principal:

> *Training our teachers in the use of the core program materials is one of the most important things we do to affect classroom instruction. Whenever we have a new teacher, I make sure they receive the initial training, and our coach provides follow-up during the year to answer questions and model lessons. Sometimes, we have also asked the publisher to come back for additional training during the year.*

This kind of training ensures maximum return on the money originally invested in core reading program materials. Many successful principals also attend training in the use of the core reading program so that they are better able to identify additional training and support needs among their teachers.

2. ***Ensuring teachers have adequate materials to support high quality instruction.*** Classroom teachers and students need access to a variety of materials as they are teaching and learning to read. Another direct way that principals can support improved literacy outcomes in their schools is to do all they can to ensure that teachers and students have access to the materials they need for effective instruction and learning. Three of the most important categories of materials are:

a. **Interesting books written at different levels of difficulty.** One key to the development of both basic and more complex reading skills is large amounts of engaged reading practice. In the early grades, supplying classroom libraries with multiple copies of interesting children's books is the most direct way of providing access to a wide range of reading material. Second-grade classrooms, for example, should contain books on a variety of topics that range in difficulty from considerably above grade level to below grade level, in order to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. One successful principal noted:

   Our students love the books in their classroom libraries—it has had a big effect on how much reading they do during the school day. They can easily take them home, and when more than one student reads the same book they have some great discussions about what they liked!

b. **Supplemental materials and technology.** If teachers need help or guidance to deliver more powerful instruction in vocabulary, reading comprehension, or phonics, they may request supplemental instructional materials. Sometimes these are books that contain instructional strategies, and sometimes they are focused curricula with lesson plans, explicit instructional routines, a scope and sequence, and practice materials. Particularly for inexperienced teachers, high quality, research-based supplemental materials can often help them provide instruction more effectively than they could if they were left to develop their own lesson materials. Computer-based instructional materials can also provide an effective supplement to teacher-led instruction, but these materials must be carefully studied to be sure they provide instruction and practice that is consistent with the overall reading instruction in the classroom. They should not be used as a *substitute* for direct instruction by the teacher. One place to examine reviews of the instructional elements and research support for supplemental materials and computer software is the "FCRR Reports" section of the website for the Florida Center for Reading Research (www.fcrr.org).

c. **Core, or comprehensive, reading programs.** This type of published program can be a strong source of support for explicit, systematic, and

well planned reading instruction in elementary school. Such programs are particularly helpful to new or inexperienced teachers, but they can also provide useful support for experienced teachers. A high quality core reading program that is consistently supported by the school leadership can be a valuable tool to increase the consistency and integration of reading instruction across classrooms within grade levels. With proper pacing and implementation, a core program can also help to ensure that the instruction provided at one grade adequately prepares students for the instruction provided at the next grade level. As long as teachers are well trained in their use, these types of programs are particularly helpful in maintaining instructional consistency in schools that have relatively high teacher turnover from year to year. Before adopting such a program for use throughout a school, it should be carefully reviewed to ensure that its scope and sequence, as well as the instructional routines it provides, are consistent with findings from current research on reading instruction for young children.

There are currently two sets of guidelines that have been widely used to determine the extent to which core reading programs implement instruction consistent with scientific research on reading for students in grades K-3. One is *A Consumer's Guide To Evaluating A Core Reading Program Grades K-3: A Critical Elements Analysis* developed by reading researchers Deborah Simmons and Ed Kameenui and available at: http://reading.uoregon.edu/curricula/con_guide.php. The second, *Guidelines for Reviewing a Reading Program,* was developed by the Florida Center for Reading Research and is available at: http://www.fcrr.org/FCRRReports/guides/grrp.pdf. The Center on Instruction has also developed a two-day sequence of professional development to support the use of the FCRR guidelines; these materials will be available Winter 2007 on the COI website (www.centeroninstruction.org/).

3. ***Monitoring classroom instruction through principal walk-throughs.*** There is an old adage that effective principals like to quote, "If you expect it, then you need to inspect it." This brings us to the subject of principal or administrative classroom walk-throughs. Successful principals, along with assistant principals or other leaders, visit all classrooms regularly. They

have usually discussed beforehand with the teachers the kinds of things they expect to see in these classroom visits, and teachers have received professional development in these areas as well. We recommend that principals focus primarily on three questions about classroom instruction when they visit classrooms in elementary school:

a. Are teachers providing explicit, well organized, and engaging whole-group instruction?
b. Is small-group instruction differentiated appropriately by student need?
c. While the teacher is teaching a small group of students, are the other students involved in independent learning activities that are appropriate and engaging?

Two successful principals commented on their use of classroom walk-throughs:

> *At the beginning the teachers seemed a little worried about "getting caught," but now it's become just such a part of the culture that it's become part of who they are as a teacher and what they do in the classroom.*
>
> *I learn about the level of instruction that a teacher is delivering, and I learn whether my teachers are changing, and transitioning to centers—I learn what is actually going on in the classroom, and the teachers are now asking me for feedback.*

Guidelines for conducting principal walk-throughs for reading in grades K-3 will be available Winter 2007 from the Center on Instruction website, along with professional development materials to support their use.

Providing Leadership for Data-Based Decision Making

One of the principal's key responsibilities is to ensure that his or her school has a comprehensive assessment plan for reading and that the data from the assessments in this plan are used effectively to guide instruction and allocate school resources. Important aspects of an assessment plan for students in grades K-3 were discussed in an earlier document from the Center on Instruction, *A Comprehensive K-3 Reading Assessment Plan: Guidance for School Leaders,* available on the COI website (www.centeroninstruction.org/).

Almost all the information in that document also applies to the later elementary grades, so the present guide will cover only the most important general concepts about data-based decision-making in an elementary school.

What kind of reading assessments do you need?

The answer to this question, of course, depends on what you need to know. The kinds of information needed to plan effective instruction for all students fall into two broad categories:

1. Information needed to help with overall planning and resource allocation, such as:

   a. *What proportion of students are able to meet grade-level standards at the end of each grade?* If the proportion is relatively low, this signals the need for strong, general improvements in all aspects of literacy instruction, including perhaps finding ways to devote more time to reading instruction during the school day. In some schools, most students will be able to make adequate progress in reading with as little as an hour a day of formal reading instruction, while other schools may need to devote as much as three hours a day to achieve the same level of progress. Information about student performance at the end of the year can also assist with planning to meet needs for reading interventions in the following year.

      One principal described "identifying the children in need" as his first step when he created his schedule and hired his support staff. For example, based on his school's data, he noted that 20 first-grade children were "at risk" for reading difficulty. As principal, this meant that he needed to hire enough support staff to teach those 20 children and schedule the reading blocks and intervention times in such a way that the support teachers could see the children in small groups. For this principal, hiring enough highly qualified reading intervention teachers was one of the most critical pieces of his successful intervention program. He determined his "intervention needs" budget first, and then worked to identify the funds within his budget to meet those needs. As he stated, "Budget allocation reflects needs of students."

   b. *Are there any particular reading skills or standards on which students are having special difficulties?* This type of information can be helpful in

planning a school-level professional development focus, or it can identify areas in which supplemental materials or technology support might be useful.

2. Information needed to guide instruction for individual students, such as:
   a. *At the beginning of the year, which students are at special risk of not being able to meet grade-level standards by the end of the year?* This information is useful for alerting teachers to students who may need special support in the classroom, and for scheduling and assigning students to intervention groups. Of course, some decisions must be made well before the school year begins, and data from the previous year's performance (item 1, above) can be used to identify the need for extra intervention resources that must be included in the school budget for the coming year.
   b. *Which students are making adequate progress, and which may need additional, or improved instructional support?* This information is essential to making important instructional adjustments or "mid-course corrections" for individual students, such as increasing instructional time, reducing instructional group size, or shifting instructional approach, to increase the rate of learning for individual students who might otherwise continue to make inadequate progress during the year.
   c. *What are the individual reading strengths and weaknesses of students?* For struggling readers in particular, it is important to understand which aspects of reading may require special instruction and support.

Assessments that are needed to answer the most important questions

Given the array of important questions outlined above, principals need to understand and use the information provided by at least four types of assessments. They are:

1. *Formal outcome assessments.* Most states now require formal end-of-year outcome assessments in reading for all students beginning in grade three. These tests typically assess students' ability to understand and think about the meaning of text in ways that are defined in the state

literacy standards. This type of test provides useful information about the proportion of students able to meet grade-level standards in reading, and, depending on the test, might also provide information about student performance on specific standards. We would also recommend that principals work with their teachers to identify useful end-of-year reading outcome measures for K-2 as well, since it is also important to assess how well instruction in each of those grades is preparing students for the learning challenges in the next grade. For example, if too many students leave second grade reading substantially below grade level, it will be very difficult for third grade teachers to teach students all they need to know to be successful on the reading standards test at the end of third grade.

2. *Formal or informal screening measures.* It is essential to have a reliable screening system at the beginning of the year to determine which students are in need of more intensive interventions and which may be expected to continue to make good progress without additional support in reading. Part of this "screening information" can be obtained from the prior year's outcome test, but many students will require additional assessment to plan appropriate instruction.
3. *Formal or informal progress monitoring assessments.* These assessments help determine whether students are making adequate progress in reading during the year. For students in intervention classes, the need for progress monitoring is particularly strong. Their progress in acquiring the skills and knowledge that are the focus of their interventions (i.e., reading accuracy, reading fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension) needs to be regularly assessed to determine if the intervention they are receiving is working effectively to improve their reading skills. Many published intervention or supplemental reading programs provide periodic assessments that help to determine whether students are making adequate progress in the program. The National Center on Student Progress Monitoring reviews specific tests that can be used for progress monitoring in reading and publishes articles that discuss how this type of assessment can be used to support improved student performance. These materials are available free of charge at: http://www.studentprogress.org/default.asp.
4. *Formal or informal diagnostic tests.* Most often, enough information is available from the previous year's outcome test and the screening system

used at the beginning of the year to get started in instruction. Once started in instruction, skilled intervention teachers can usually "diagnose" a student's instructional needs through a variety of informal procedures, such as observing their responses to specific tasks, examining work products, or asking questions about their understanding or strategies. However, in some cases, students may have special difficulties that interfere with their response to instruction and may require formal diagnostic assessment. A general rule of thumb is that formal, time-consuming diagnostic assessments should be given only when there is a need for specific information to guide instruction that cannot be obtained in some other, more efficient way. Lengthy diagnostic assessments should never be given to large groups of students as the first step in gathering information to guide instruction.

The need for some type of data management system

Using data effectively to make instructional decisions requires that the data be available in a usable form (i.e., tables, graphs, charts) to everyone who needs to see it. This includes the principal, the assistant principal, the reading coach, the school literacy leadership team, subject area team leaders, and individual teachers. Currently, schools are experimenting with a variety of systems, some of them commercially available computer programs, to manage their assessment data. Eventually, the most successful systems are likely to involve some type of computer support that allows data to be entered by teachers, but which can also accept "batch" data from other programs that automatically score different kinds of assessments. One of the first planning and discussion points for a principal and school-level literacy leadership team to consider is what type of data management system they need in order to access all the data necessary to plan instruction for all students. One experienced and very successful principal points out that it is "critical to access data necessary to plan instruction and not overwhelm teachers with every piece of data available." Over time, successful schools (and principals) become more and more knowledgeable about the types of data that are most helpful in making good instructional decisions—and with this increasing knowledge, the use of data to guide instruction becomes increasingly efficient.

Decision-making meetings

A universal feature of schools that are using data successfully to inform instruction is a regular pattern of meetings that bring leaders and teachers together to evaluate data and make decisions. Whether these are annual meetings to evaluate the results from the end-of-year outcome assessments and make budget and planning decisions for the next year, or whether they are weekly or monthly meetings to evaluate individual student progress, they all have a similar structure. Critical elements are:

1. *Attendance of all who are necessary to help make and follow up on decisions.* The principal may not be able to attend all of the "data meetings" held in the school, but some sort of regular attendance and participation in these meetings by the principal will greatly increase the meetings' effectiveness. The principal should regularly consider which meetings most require strong school-level leadership to be successful.
2. *Systematic method for reviewing data.* Teachers should know ahead of time what types of data will be reviewed. It is helpful to have standard forms or formats for all teachers to use, so that data are considered in a consistent fashion.
3. *Recording decisions, and designating responsibility for follow-up.* As one strong principal pointed out, "You can have great data and make smart decisions, but if there is no follow-up, the meetings are essentially a waste of time."

As a final note, interviews with and observations of successful principals continually underline the fact that the principal's attitude toward data and his or her consistent use of data in evaluating instructional progress and instructional needs sets the tone for the whole school. Effective principals are knowledgeable about student data, and actively use it to guide instructional decisions at many different levels.

Providing Leadership for School-Level Planning and Implementation of Effective Interventions

Reading interventions for students who struggle in learning to read must be sufficiently powerful to *accelerate* reading development. Students selected to receive interventions are already behind, and for them to catch up to their

peers, they must actually grow in reading ability *faster* than average students in their classroom. In other words, these students must not only achieve expected yearly growth, but they must also make significant "catch-up" growth if they are to meet grade-level standards in reading. Many research studies have shown that it is possible to achieve this type of acceleration in reading growth for struggling readers in elementary school, but to achieve it consistently requires an effective school-level system. The principal plays a key role in implementing this system because school-level resources must be combined with school-level *planning* and *decision-making* in order to create an intervention system that allocates time, materials, and instructors for students according to their individual needs. The planning and resource challenges can be daunting when a school has many students who require intensive instructional support in order to make adequate progress in learning to read. We have identified four critical aspects of a school-level intervention plan that typically require strong involvement from the principal in order to be successful. The principal should:

1. *Develop a school schedule that allows sufficient time for interventions.* The key idea in scheduling interventions is that a specific time in the child's day should be set aside for the intervention, and enough time should be devoted to the intervention to effectively accelerate his or her learning. In general, the amount of time in which students receive interventions should be *proportional to the extent they are behind in reading.* Students who are seriously behind in reading should receive substantially more time in intervention than those who are moderately behind. Interventions that are scheduled haphazardly, whenever time or a teacher is available, typically are not effective with students who have serious reading difficulties. These children require consistent, high quality instruction for enough time each day to allow them to "close the reading gap" with their peers. Other than instructional quality, the two dimensions of interventions most related to rate of reading growth are time spent in instruction and the size of the instructional group. The schedule is the part of the system that provides sufficient time for the intervention to work. Some students may require as much as 60 to 90 minutes a day of extra instruction in reading in order to maintain adequate progress toward grade-level reading standards at the end of the year. One successful principal reported:

We really started making headway with our interventions when we set aside enough time outside the reading block to provide a double dose of instruction for our most at-risk students. It just takes time to provide these students what they need.

Principals sometimes ask, "If we devote substantial amounts of time to reading intervention for our most struggling readers, what gets left out of their day?" It is impossible to answer this question in the abstract, because it depends on so many local circumstances. However, a useful way of thinking about this question is provided in a statement from one of the references at the end of this document. As part of their description of efforts to have 90% of their students reading at grade level by the end of third grade, officials of the Kennewick, Washington school district said, "It matters little what else they learn in elementary school if they do not learn to read at grade level"(Fielding et al., 2007, p. 48). While it is true that we want students to learn many things from their experiences in elementary school, there can be little doubt that learning to read well is fundamental to future educational attainment. Learning in all the content areas in middle and high school depends critically on students' ability to read and comprehend printed material, whether it appears in their textbook, on computers, or in magazines. Since students' ability to comprehend text depends in part on what they already know about the subject of their reading, it is clear that we cannot neglect the growth of knowledge and vocabulary for students who struggle in learning to read. One way to accommodate the need for both more reading instruction and growth of knowledge in science, social studies, and history is to include more interesting expository text in the reading lessons we provide to students in the early elementary grades.

2. *Provide sufficient personnel to deliver the interventions in small groups.* As a general rule of thumb, the smaller the instructional group, the more intensive the instruction. One of the principal's greatest challenges is finding enough teachers so that intervention groups can be small enough (1 to 4 students) to be effective. Principals approach this challenge in a variety of ways. Some reduce central office staff to find money to hire one or two more paraprofessionals. Others train their special area teachers

(art, music, physical education) to lead one or two intervention groups a day. Others allocate almost all of their Title 1 funds to paying the salaries of intervention specialists.

3. *Identify appropriate instructional programs and materials to support effective interventions, and provide appropriate training to those who will implement the program.* As with classroom instruction, intervention lessons can either be planned by the teacher using a variety of materials available at the school, or they can be provided in a published intervention program that includes lesson plans, instructional routines, and practice materials. Many of these programs are currently available, and provide a useful "scaffold" to help less experienced teachers provide powerful instruction. A good rule of thumb is that the less experienced the teacher, the more structured and "scripted" the intervention program should be. Even qualified paraprofessionals, or other teachers not specifically trained in reading, can provide effective interventions if they are trained and supported in the use of a research-based intervention program. Two sources of information to help identify research-based intervention programs are the What Works Clearing House (www.whatworks.ed.gov/), sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, and the "FCRR Reports" section of the website at the Florida Center for Reading Research (www.fcrr.org). With regard to intervention programs, one successful principal offered this advice:

   > *I think the key thing here is weeding through it all and selecting just a few programs. Use a few programs very well, instead of a lot fairly well. That will go a great distance toward making your students and your staff successful.*

4. *Provide oversight, energy, and follow-up in managing the intervention system.* Because interventions must be responsive to the needs of individual students, they require dynamic management at the school level. Principals can exercise leadership by using data meetings to ask about the progress of specific children, help problem-solve ways to increase the power of interventions when students are not making adequate progress, resolve scheduling issues as they arise, and identify new needs as they emerge. School leaders also need to be a source of encouragement and support, because providing interventions to students who struggle in

reading is very hard work. Seeing students progress is rewarding in itself, but support and celebration of accomplishments with school leaders provides an extra source of energy and motivation for teachers and students as well.

For more details on an effective school-level intervention system we encourage you to consult another Center on Instruction document, *A Principal's Guide to Intensive Reading Interventions for Struggling Readers in Early Elementary School [K-3],* available on the COI website, www.centeroninstruction.org.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR READING INSTRUCTION AFTER THIRD GRADE

The characteristics of effective reading instruction for students in grades K-3 have received a great deal of attention in the recent past. Consensus documents like the Report of the National Reading Panel that was published in 2000, and Reading First, the large federal and state effort (initiated in 2002) that has focused on improving reading instruction in grades K-3, are partly responsible for the increased concentration on K-3 reading instruction. Considered as a whole, less research has focused on reading instruction for students after grade three than in the early grades. However, in some cases, such as the important areas of reading comprehension and vocabulary instruction, there is actually more research available to guide reading instruction in grade three and after than in grades K-2.

One of the central points of this brief guide is that reading instruction must not stop after grade three. Although the focus of this instruction is typically different than for the early grades, it is critical that reading instruction continue in order to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the complex reading challenges they will face after they leave elementary school. For students who are still struggling with basic reading competencies after third grade, the remaining elementary school years are the best time for them to receive the intensive interventions they need to prepare them to participate effectively in content-area classrooms in middle and high school.

Characteristics of Effective Classroom Reading Instruction in the Late Elementary Grades

Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents, produced by the Center on Instruction, describes the characteristics of effective reading instruction for students in grades 4-12. As was noted earlier, this instruction should focus primarily on building the broad knowledge, thinking skills, and reading strategies required for comprehending complex text. One key point of the adolescent literacy document is that literacy instruction should extend into, and be part of, instruction in the content areas of science, history, social studies, literature, etc. In these subject areas, the teacher's responsibility is not only to teach the

essential content effectively, but also to explicitly teach students how to comprehend and learn from the texts used in the classroom. Research has identified a number of effective instructional strategies for improving reading comprehension. They include:

1. *Instruction in a variety of strategies for improving and monitoring comprehension.* Some of these strategies, such as actively relating background knowledge to the text being read, or rereading text when confusion arises, are useful across all subject areas. Others may be specific to the science or history text being used in the classroom. To support continued reading growth in the late elementary grades, classroom teachers must explicitly describe and model useful reading strategies, and then provide support so that students can learn to use them on their own.
2. *Extended discussions of a text's meaning.* These discussions are designed to help students discover and learn to use the kinds of thinking processes that good readers use when they actively read text for understanding. These discussions, which may initially be teacher-led, but may in time occur primarily among the students, require students to analyze and think about text more deeply than they might on their own. As they repeatedly engage in this type of thinking and analysis in high quality discussions, they gradually learn to do this type of thinking when reading by themselves.
3. *Systematic and explicit instruction in essential vocabulary.* Effective vocabulary instruction must go substantially beyond simple instructions to "look words up in the dictionary." Although it does involve providing "student-friendly" definitions, effective vocabulary instruction also involves multiple, teacher-guided opportunities to identify the meaning of words in different contexts. Students should also be taught strategies for independently inferring the meaning of words when they encounter them in their reading.
4. *Creating a learning environment in which students are motivated to understand and learn from the text.* Students who are pursuing meaningful learning goals, developing a project they have helped to design, or working with other students in a cooperative learning group, tend to be more highly engaged in trying to understand what they are reading. Students

with high motivation to understand what they are reading are much more likely to learn and apply the strategic and analytic thinking skills required for good comprehension than those who are not interested in what they are reading.

Reading Interventions for Students in the Late Elementary Grades

The general ideas for a school-level intervention system described earlier in this guide apply to both the early and later grades in elementary school. However, principals should understand three facts about interventions that pertain particularly to students in grades 3-4 and above.

1. There are likely to be some students after grade three who will continue to need intensive support in the basic reading skills required for accurate reading of text. In a school that has an effective overall reading program, there are likely to be very few of these students after grade three. However, for new students who move in, or for students who have particularly severe disabilities in reading, the school must have the capacity to provide these students with skillful, and perhaps very intensive, instruction in basic reading skills, including phonemic decoding and word analysis strategies.
2. There will likely be a larger group of students who begin to struggle to meet grade-level reading standards because of a lack of fluency, or poor vocabulary, or failure to use appropriate thinking strategies while they read. These students may have made adequate or marginal progress in the earlier grades, but as both texts and tests become more complex after third grade, their weaknesses in higher level reading skills may become more noticeable. These students may require more intensive support to develop strategic reading skills, vocabulary, and fluency than can be provided by the classroom teacher alone.
3. The third fact is not really a fact, but rather a recommendation. It is based primarily on common sense and general learning theory, but it is considered part of best practice for older struggling readers. If students in the upper elementary grades receive intensive, small-group instruction in comprehension strategies from an intervention specialist, some of these same strategies should be taught and reinforced by the classroom

teacher(s) during the rest of the day. Although struggling readers may require more intensive and explicit instruction to become active, strategic readers, they are more likely to generalize the strategies they are taught if some of the strategies they learn in their intervention classes are also taught and reinforced by their classroom teacher.

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CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This has been a very brief overview of the major leadership tasks required to implement and sustain an effective reading program in an elementary school. It is grounded in research on reading and reading instruction, and also incorporates information from principals who have led successful reading programs in their schools. As brief as this guide is, the complexity of the effort it describes may seem daunting to principals who are new, or who are just beginning systematic work on this topic in their schools. Successful principals are also quick to acknowledge that creating a comprehensive reading program that addresses all the elements in this guide takes time. The best advice is to examine the current situation in your school in light of the information in this guide, identify the things you are already doing well, and begin developing a plan to systematically increase your effectiveness in areas that need additional attention. Although you may want to concentrate on only a few elements at a time, it is important to maintain a clear vision of the entire school-level system outlined in this guide, because it is the complete system, interacting in all its parts, which will eventually lead to the best outcomes for your students.

As a final note, one experienced principal who provided feedback on an early draft of this guide noted that it had correctly described the essential technical and administrative elements required for a successful elementary school reading program, but had not sufficiently emphasized the interpersonal aspects of the principal's work. In her words,

> *It covers all that I believe will be a tremendous help to principals. However, the need for relationships and connectedness amongst administration and teachers in order to best meet the needs of students is also important; a partnership at the school level in which there is shared decision making to ensure buy-in of the instructional staff. With all the technical and research information it is important to note that a part of our goal is to instill in children a love for reading and learning. With the focus on data and accountability we must make a conscious effort not to overlook the human or affective side of learning.*

We wholeheartedly agree with this statement, and find it consistent with our understanding of both effective leadership and effective reading instruction.

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