

## Adolescent Literacy Addressing the Needs of Students in Grades 4–12 Joan Sedita

“Reading is the key. Without it, the instructions for playing Monopoly, the recipe for Grandma’s lasagna, *The Cat in the Hat*, the directions to the job interview, the Psalms, the lyrics to *Stairway to Heaven*—all these and a lifetime of other mysteries large and small may never be known.” (*Kansas City Star newspaper*)

The quote above reminds us that literacy skills in the 21st century are more essential than ever for success in education, work, citizenship, and our personal lives. However, far too many older students and adults do not have the necessary reading and writing skills to succeed in postsecondary education or the ever-increasing number of jobs that require strong literacy skills.

During the 1990s and through 2008, significant emphasis was placed on the use of research to determine how children learn to read and why some students struggle with reading. Seminal meta-analyses of research and subsequent summary reports such as *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow & Burns, 1998) and the report of the National Reading Panel (2000) began to connect that research to implications for instruction. A number of state initiatives, but especially the Reading First initiative, part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (PL 107-110), contributed significantly to the practical application of science-based literacy instruction in Grades K–3 throughout the country.

Early literacy achievement, however, is not necessarily a guarantee that literacy skills will continue to grow as students move beyond Grade 3. In *Reading Next*, it is noted that

Recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading results indicate that efforts to improve K–3 literacy are paying off at the 4th-grade level, but these improvements do not necessarily translate into better achievement among adolescents... Comparing the most recent NAEP results for all three grade levels (i.e., 4, 8, and 12) to those from 1992, the percentage of students scoring proficient has significantly improved among 4th graders, but not among 8th and 12th graders. (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, pp. 7–8)

Scores at the secondary level, where there has been relatively little investment, have remained flat since the 1970s (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). The following observation from *Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success* sums up the challenges faced after Grade 3:

The truth is that good early literacy instruction does not inoculate students against struggle or failure later on. Beyond grade 3 adolescent learners in our schools must decipher more complex passages, synthesize information at a higher level, and learn to form independent conclusions based on evidence. They must also develop special skills and strategies for reading text in each of the differing content areas—meaning that a student who “naturally” does well in one area may struggle in another. (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010, p. x)

This chapter offers an overview of literacy as it specifically relates to students in Grades 4–12 and how it has evolved as a separate issue from early literacy. While the research base is nascent, a growing body of work is developing about how students in these grades learn to increase their reading and writing skills, why some struggle, and what effective instruction looks like. This chapter will define adolescent literacy, summarize evidence from major research reports concerning adolescent literacy instruction and interventions, and present a multicomponent model for literacy planning at the intermediate, middle, and high school grades.

### WHAT IS ADOLESCENT LITERACY?

The term *adolescent* can be misleading—adolescent literacy is not limited to teenagers. This label is used to describe literacy skills for students in Grades 4–12. The axiom that through Grade 3, students are learning to read, but beginning in Grade 4 they shift to reading to learn (Chall, 1983), sums up why Grade 4 is a logical place to make the jump from early literacy to adolescent literacy. The publication of the widely cited reports *Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) and *Writing Next* (Graham & Perin, 2007), which identified adolescent literacy as

beginning in Grade 4, helped solidify this definition of *adolescent literacy*.

The National Reading Panel (2000) identified five components that are essential for learning to read successfully: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. There is an assumption that the basic components of reading that have to do with decoding and encoding the words on the page (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency) are in place for grade-level readers by Grade 4. While the components of reading that address making meaning (vocabulary and comprehension) must also be addressed in the early grades, the emphasis on these components becomes paramount in the upper grades.

This does not mean that students in intermediate grades do not need to continue to improve basic literacy skills. Students must increasingly raise their fluency rates, moving from an average benchmark rate at the end of Grade 4 of 123 words correct per minute (WCPM) to 151 WCPM at the end of Grade 8 (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2005). Advanced phonics and word study skills must also be taught beyond Grade 3. For example, many students may not be developmentally ready to learn some advanced phonics concepts until at least Grade 4 (e.g., digraph *ch* as in *chorus*, *y* as short *i* as in *system*, multisyllable words with prefixes and suffixes added to Latin or Greek roots) (Moats, 1995). These skills should be addressed during intermediate-grade reading instruction that is typically provided during an English-language arts (ELA) period. We also know that for many struggling adolescent readers, deficits in phonics and fluency skills contribute to poor comprehension (Moats, 2001), and these must be addressed through intervention.

Adolescent literacy encompasses the skills that must be taught to all students so they can meet increasingly challenging reading and writing demands as they move through the upper grades, as well as what needs to be done for those students who fall behind. In the model provided later in this chapter for literacy planning, a framework is presented that addresses literacy instruction at two levels:

- Instruction for all students embedded in all subject areas that focuses on vocabulary, comprehension, and content writing
- Supplemental and intervention instruction for struggling students delivered in an intervention setting that focuses on decoding, fluency, and language structure as well as vocabulary, comprehension, and content writing

## **WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE LITERACY SKILLS OF AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS?**

While the increased focus on adolescent literacy is a natural extension of efforts to improve literacy skills for students in Grades K–3, the National Adolescent Literacy Coalition (NALC) maintains that this focus has a lot to do with Americans' increasing sense of anxiety about the economic and civic health of the nation (NALC, 2007). Graham and Perrin (2007) pointed out that reading comprehension and writing skills are predictors of academic success and a basic requirement for participation in civic life and in the global economy. The statistics about the lack of literacy skills among American middle and high school students and adults are alarming. For example,

- Data from the 2007 NAEP in reading show that 69% of eighth-grade students fall below proficient level in their ability to comprehend the meaning of text at their grade level, and 26% read below the basic level (Lee, Griggs, & Donahue, 2007).
- As measured by the NAEP, roughly two thirds of 12th graders read and write below a proficient level, and half of those students lack even the most basic literacy skills needed to succeed in school. Those figures did not change between 1974 and 2005 (NALC, 2007).
- The 2002 NAEP writing report noted that only 22%–26% of 4th, 8th, and 12th graders scored at the proficient level, and alarmingly high proportions of students were found to be at or below the basic level (Graham & Perrin, 2007).
- Achievement gaps in upper grades have not narrowed. In 2005, only 12% of African American and 15% of Hispanic eighth graders read at or above a proficient level, compared to 39% of Caucasian eighth graders. In a typical high-poverty urban school, approximately half of incoming ninth-grade students read at a sixth- or seventh-grade level or below (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005).
- Among the 30 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) free-market countries, the United States is the only nation where young adults are less educated than the previous generation. The United States is also losing ground in international comparisons in terms of high school diplomas and college degrees awarded. Furthermore, while the United States scores as one of the highest countries in

numbers of well-educated people, it also scores near the top in the largest number of people at the lowest education levels—about 55% of adults at the lowest literacy levels did not graduate from high school and have no Tests of Educational Development (general equivalency diploma, or GED) or high school equivalency diploma (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2008).

- Every year, 1 in 3 young adults drops out of high school (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2008), and one of the most commonly cited reasons for this is that students simply do not have the literacy skills to keep up with the high school curriculum, which has become increasingly complex (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Kamil, 2003).
- Almost 40% of high school graduates lack the reading and writing skills that employers seek, and almost one third of high school graduates who enroll in college require remediation (National Governors' Association, 2005).
- Deficits in basic skills cost the nation's businesses, universities, and under-prepared high school graduates as much as \$16 billion annually in lost productivity and remedial costs (Greene, 2000).
- On average, college graduates earn 70% more than their high school graduate counterparts, while high school dropouts are 4 times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed (Sum, Taggart, & McLaughlin, 2001). Regardless of educational attainment, higher levels of literacy translate into higher earnings (National Governors' Association, 2005).
- The 25 fastest-growing professions have far greater than average literacy demands, while the fastest-declining professions have lower-than-average literacy demands (Barton, 2000).
- One in every 100 U.S. adults 16 years and older is in prison or jail. About 43% do not have a high school diploma or equivalent, and 56% have very low literacy skills. Ninety-five percent of incarcerated people return to their communities, where it is hard to find jobs because of a prison record but even harder without the necessary literacy skills (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2008).

While the statistics noted above may be overwhelming, the growing acknowledgment that we need to provide better literacy instruction for adolescent students is being matched by increasing federal and state efforts to support schools in this endeavor. More importantly, it is also becoming clear that schools can provide better instruction if they put into practice what is already known about effective reading and writing instruction in the upper grades (NALC, 2007). States that have invested in adolescent literacy initiatives are already seeing positive benefits for their efforts such as Florida's *Just Read!* initiative that mandated K–12 district literacy plans, increased building-based reading coaches in middle grades, and significantly increased professional development for teachers in upper grades. Massachusetts is another example. An adolescent literacy task force was convened in 2006 that developed a 5-year strategic plan to improve literacy in Grades 4–12 across the state, including revision of state standards, enhancing the state testing system, and increasing professional development for teachers in these grades (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010).

## **AN INCREASE IN ATTENTION TO ADOLESCENT LITERACY**

There has been a significant increase in attention to adolescent literacy since the start of the new millennium, partly from the national standards movement and the urgency from demands for accountability among the state and federal education officials. The good news is that there is more research available on effective practice for adolescent literacy than ever before. Evidence of the increase in attention and availability of resources can be seen in new initiatives such as those noted below.

- AdLit.org

AdLit.org is a national multimedia project offering information and resources specifically related to adolescent readers and writers. AdLit.org is one of several literacy sites administered by WETA, the public television and radio station in Washington, D.C., including *Reading Rockets* and *LDOnline*. The site provides information and lists resources on adolescent literacy for educators, parents and students.

- Alliance for Excellent Education

The Alliance for Excellent Education (<http://www.all4ed.org>) was founded in 2001. It is a national policy and advocacy organization that focuses on at-risk secondary students and serves as a national clearinghouse on policies that support effective high-school reform. In 2003, it established an Adolescent Literacy Advisory Group, which resulted in the publication of a series of adolescent literacy reports, white papers, and research

meta-analyses. In addition, the Alliance has hosted a number of conferences and symposiums focused on adolescent literacy.

- Center on Instruction

The Center on Instruction (<http://centeroninstruction.org>) provides information about scientifically based research and information on reading and serves as a resource for the 16 regional U.S. Department of Education Comprehensive Centers. Beginning in 2006, the Center began publishing a number of adolescent literacy guidance documents and practice briefs aimed at connecting current research to practice.

- Institute of Education Sciences

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES; <http://ies.ed.gov>), National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, focused its attention on adolescent literacy in 2008 with its publication of *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices*. This practice guide offers specific evidence-based recommendations that educators can use to improve literacy levels for students in Grades 4–12.

- National Governors' Association, Center for Best Practices

In 2005, the National Governors' Association (<http://www.nga.org>), through its Center for Best Practices, signaled its desire to focus on adolescent literacy when it published the report *Reading to Achieve: A Governor's Guide to Adolescent Literacy*. In 2006, the association funded the *Reading to Achieve: State Policies to Promote Adolescent Literacy* initiative. This initiative provided assistance and funding to develop state literacy plans and policies to improve adolescent literacy to Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, and North Carolina.

- National Institute for Literacy

The National Institute for Literacy (a federal agency established in 1991; <http://www.nifl.gov>) now has a specific initiative to address adolescent literacy. Its 2007 report *What Content-Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy* summarizes the literature on adolescent literacy and recommends methods for building adolescent reading and writing skills in the classroom, with an emphasis on what content-area teachers can do.

## A REVIEW OF MAJOR ADOLESCENT LITERACY REPORTS

As noted previously, in just the past few years a number of resources have become available that provide information about research to date regarding adolescent literacy. In 2002, the Carnegie Corporation of New York commissioned the RAND Corporation (a non-profit research and analysis institution) to convene a small group of scholars and policy analysts to discuss the relatively small research base that existed at the time on adolescent literacy. While there was a significant body of knowledge about effective literacy instruction in primary grades, adolescent literacy research had been comparatively ignored (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010). Beginning in 2004, supported in part through funding from the Carnegie Corporation, a more substantial knowledge base for understanding adolescent literacy and what it takes to implement this knowledge in schools has accumulated. This section summarizes the findings from nine seminal reports and research meta-analyses that address adolescent literacy (see the list of reports in Table 17.1). The summary addresses instruction, assessment, professional development, and literacy planning and policy issues.

**Table 17.1**

### List of Adolescent Literacy Reports

1. 2004: Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy (Biancarosa & Snow)
2. 2007: Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools (Graham & Perrin)
3. 2007: Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas: Getting to the Core of Middle and High School Improvement (Heller & Greenleaf)

4. 2007: *Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents: A Guidance Document from the Center on Instruction* (Torgesen, Houston, Rissman, Decker, Roberts, Vaughn, Wexler, Francis, Rivera, & Lesaux)
5. 2007: *What Content-Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy* (National Institute for Literacy)
6. 2007: *Interventions for Adolescent Struggling Readers: A Meta-Analysis with Implications for Practice* (Scammacca, Roberts, Vaughn, Edmonds, Wexler, Reutebuch, & Torgesen)
7. 2007: *Double the Work: Challenges and Solutions to Acquiring Language and Academic Literacy for Adolescent English Language Learners –A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York* (Short & Fitzsimmons)
8. 2008: *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices* (Kamil, Borman, Dole, Kral, Salinger, & Torgesen)
9. 2010: *Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success* (Carnegie Council on Advancing Literacy)

## **Instruction**

The findings related to literacy instruction are organized into four categories: content literacy instruction for all students, interventions for struggling readers and writers, literacy motivation and engagement, and English language learners (ELLs).

### Content Literacy Instruction for All Students

A major and consistent recommendation found in all of the reports is that content literacy skills, taught by content-area teachers, using subject-specific reading materials, and embedded in content-area instruction are essential for improving adolescent achievement.

*Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas* (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007) focused specifically on reading and writing instruction in the content areas, including math, science, English, and history. This report maintained that because content instruction comprises the heart of a secondary school curriculum, content literacy instruction must be the cornerstone of any movement to build high-quality secondary schools. While the report applauded efforts to provide support for adolescents who struggle with literacy, it reminded us of the equally important goal of addressing the achievement of the higher literacy levels all students will need in order to succeed in postsecondary training programs, college, and the growing number of jobs that require high-level literacy skills.

Heller and Greenleaf (2007) noted that very few American students, including many who test at grade level, develop sophisticated literacy skills. Reading and writing are more than just basic skills that students use to learn subject matter. Literacy is the very stuff from which the academic content areas are made, and students must learn how to read and write for specific kinds of content learning in order to make progress in learning those subjects.

In the report *Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents*, (Torgesen and colleagues (2007) made the same point and noted that in order to meet adolescent literacy goals all teachers must be involved, especially since most middle and high school student spend most of their time in content-area classes and must learn to read expository, informational, content-area texts with greater proficiency. The report said, “Although reading strategies might be taught explicitly in a designated reading support class, students are unlikely to generalize them broadly to content areas unless teachers also explicitly support and elaborate the strategies’ use with content-area texts” (p. 12).

Beginning in the middle grades, reading in content areas becomes longer, more complex, and more full of content. It also becomes increasingly more varied in vocabulary, text structure, purpose, and style (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Every academic subject has different ways of using written materials to communicate information, which means being literate may mean different things in differing contexts and content areas. One of the main conclusions of *Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas* is that comprehension (including before, during, and after routines), word-level, and writing strategies are best taught in the content area classes using challenging, content-rich texts.

*Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004, p. 4) identifies 15 elements of successful programs designed to improve adolescent literacy achievement in middle and high schools. Six of these elements directly address content literacy instruction:

- *Direct, explicit comprehension instruction*—in the strategies and processes that proficient readers use to understand what they read, including summarizing, keeping track of one’s own understanding, and a host of other practices
- *Effective instructional principles embedded in content*—language arts teachers using content-area texts and content-area teachers providing instruction and practice in reading and writing skills specific to their subject area
- *Extended time for literacy*—including 2–4 hours of literacy instruction and practice that takes place in language arts and content-area classes
- *Text-based collaborative learning*—involves students interacting with one another around a variety of texts
- *Diverse texts*—texts at a variety of difficulty levels and on a variety of topics
- *Intensive writing*—instruction connected to the kinds of writing tasks students will have to perform well in high school and beyond

In 2008, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) published the practice guide *Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices* (Kamil et al., 2008). The goal of the guide was to present specific and coherent evidence-based recommendations that educators can use to improve literacy levels among students in Grades 4–12. The report made five recommendations about improving practice, provided a review of the evidence supporting each recommendation, and offered suggestions for how to carry out the recommendation. Of the five recommendations, the first three directly addressed content literacy instruction:

1. *Provide explicit vocabulary instruction*: Teachers should provide students with explicit vocabulary instruction, both as part of reading and language arts classes and content classes such as science and social studies. By giving students explicit instruction in vocabulary, teachers help them learn the meaning of new words and strengthen their independent skills of constructing the meaning of text (p. 11). To carry out the recommendation, the report suggests that teachers dedicate a portion of the regular classroom lesson to explicit vocabulary instruction, use repeated exposure to new words in multiple oral and written contexts to allow sufficient practice sessions, and give sufficient opportunities to use new vocabulary in a variety of contexts through activities such as discussion, writing, and extended reading.
2. *Provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction*: Teachers should provide adolescents with direct and explicit instruction in comprehension strategies to improve students’ reading comprehension. Comprehension strategies are routines and procedures that readers use to help them make sense of texts. These strategies include, but are not limited to, summarizing, asking and answering questions, paraphrasing, and finding the main idea (p. 16). To carry out the recommendation, the report suggests that teachers select carefully the text to use when teaching a given strategy, show students how to apply the strategies to different texts, use direct and explicit instruction for how to use comprehension strategies, provide the appropriate amount of guided practice, and make sure students understand that the goal is to understand the content of the text.
3. *Provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation*: Teachers should provide opportunities for students to engage in high-quality discussions of the meaning and interpretation of texts in various content areas. These discussions can occur in whole classroom groups or in small student groups under the general guidance of the teacher (p. 21). To carry out the recommendation, the report suggests that teachers carefully prepare for the discussion, ask follow-up questions that help provide continuity and extend the discussion, provide a task that students can follow when they discuss texts together in small groups, and develop and practice the use of a specific discussion protocol.

*What Content-Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy* (National Institute of Literacy, 2007) also addressed vocabulary and comprehension instruction in the content classroom but added morphology as well. The report pointed out that difficulty with decoding may be the cause for why some students struggle to read. It noted that while it is important for content-area teachers to understand the role of decoding and fluency, they should not be expected to provide intervention instruction in these components. The report defined content reading components and suggested implications for content classroom instruction:

- *Morphology*—Morphology describes how words are formed from morphemes, the smallest units of meaning in a word (e.g., roots, suffixes, prefixes). Students who understand words at the morphemic level are better able to get the meaning of words and use their knowledge of morphological structure to recognize

complex words. When students learn frequently used morphemes, this knowledge improves their spelling, decoding and vocabulary. Content-area teachers should focus on teaching base words, prefixes and suffixes, and compound words relevant to the new content-area vocabulary being introduced.

- *Vocabulary*—Vocabulary refers to words that are used in speech and print to communicate. Vocabulary knowledge is important to reading because the oral and written use of words promotes comprehension and communication. Good readers know a wide range of vocabulary. Preteaching new vocabulary facilitates reading comprehension by giving the students the meanings of the words before they encounter them. Content-area teachers should also use direct and explicit instruction to teach specific key content vocabulary and provide opportunities for students to make connections to related words and background knowledge.
- *Text Comprehension*—Comprehension is the process of extracting or constructing meaning from words once they have been identified. Comprehension varies depending on the text being read. Good readers are purposeful, strategic, and critical readers who understand the content presented in various types of texts. Content-area teachers should incorporate the following comprehension strategies into their content-area instruction: generate questions, answer questions, monitor comprehension, summarize text, use text structure, and use graphic and semantic organizers.

Three of the reports summarized in this chapter address writing skills. In addition to the three reading components noted previously, *What Content-Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy* (National Institute of Literacy, 2007) provided recommendations for teaching writing in the content classroom. Writing is the ability to compose text for various purposes and audiences and is a tool for communicating, learning, and expressing oneself to persuade others. Along with reading, writing improves one's capacity to learn. Good writers employ different strategies to write across various genres and disciplines. They are self-directed, goal-oriented, and employ self-regulation strategies to help them plan, organize and revise their writing. Content-area teachers should teach the steps of the writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing). They should provide a supportive environment for writing, including making writing a regular part of content classroom activities, conveying the ways in which writing is useful in school and outside of school, and giving students opportunities to engage in extended writing.

Torgesen et al. (2007) also addressed the importance of including writing as part of literacy instruction for adolescents. There is a close connection between reading and writing across the curriculum, and writing can be used to improve reading comprehension. "Writing activities are often used as a way for students to express their understanding of what they read, and discussing these written products can be an important way for students to receive feedback on their responses to text" (2007, p. 16). The report recommended making close connections between reading and writing activities as one important vehicle for improving middle and high school literacy.

*Writing Next* (Graham & Perrin, 2007) focused exclusively on writing and summarized the results of a large-scale statistical review of research into the effects of specific types of writing instruction on adolescents' writing proficiency. The report identified the following 11 elements of writing instruction found to be effective for helping adolescent students learn to write well and to use writing as a tool for learning. All eleven elements represent instruction that can be embedded in content classroom instruction for all students:

1. *Writing strategies*, which involve teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions
2. *Summarizing*, which involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts
3. *Collaborative writing*, which uses instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions
4. *Specific product goals*, which assigns students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete
5. *Word processing*, which uses computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments
6. *Sentence combining*, which involves teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences
7. *Prewriting*, which engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition
8. *Inquiry activities*, which engage students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task
9. *Process writing approach*, which interweaves a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing
10. *Study of models*, which provides students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good

writing

11. *Writing for content learning*, which uses writing as a tool for learning content material

### Interventions for Struggling Readers and Writers

Many of the adolescent literacy reports and numerous district and statewide initiatives focus on providing more effective literacy instruction to the approximately 8 million students in America in Grades 4–12 who read far below grade level. Heller and Greenleaf (2007) concluded that it is possible to help students make significant gains in literacy and perhaps even catch up to their higher performing peers:

Schools can make a point of assessing students' reading skills when they enter school, in order to identify those who read below grade level and discern their specific learning needs. They can provide intensive support for low-level readers, helping them make rapid progress in reading fluency, basic comprehension, and other skills. They can make special efforts to motivate those students and engage them in reading and writing assignments that tap into their individual interests. And they can offer teachers high-quality professional development in various aspects of secondary literacy instruction. If state and federal policymakers follow through on current efforts and fund and support these strategies, the effects will be profound, giving millions of youngsters a real opportunity to build on the rudimentary mechanics of reading that were taught in primary school. (2007, p. 4)

Who should provide intervention instruction? *Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) was one of the first reports to address the need for interventions beyond content classroom instruction and identified *strategic tutoring* as an essential element of successful adolescent literacy programs. Some students, especially those who struggle with decoding and fluency skills, require intense, individualized instruction. *Reading Next* recommends the availability of strategic tutoring sessions during or after the school day to provide literacy intervention instruction as well as skills for how to learn their content information.

Torgesen et al. (2007) suggested that it is not reasonable to expect content-area teachers to teach basic reading skills to students who are reading significantly below grade level. Teaching word-analysis strategies to older students requires special knowledge and skills that are far removed from the training and interests of content-area teachers, and these students require more explicit, individualized, and intensive instruction, as well as extended practice to master new reading strategies or improve word level skills. The IES report (Kamil et al., 2008) supported this conclusion. Specifically, the last of its five recommendations was, “make available intensive and individualized interventions for struggling readers that can be provided by trained specialists” (p. 7). This does not mean that content-area teachers should not play a role in helping struggling readers and writers. A combination of word analysis and reading comprehension skills taught by a skilled reading teacher and reinforcement and elaboration of these skills by content-area teachers is the best way to improve adolescent literacy (Torgesen et al., 2007). Biancarosa and Snow pointed out that when content-area teachers have struggling readers in their classes, “instruction in general education classes should be differentiated to allow students access to important content” (2004, p. 18).

What have we learned about the kind of instruction older struggling readers need? Kamil et al. (2008) noted that failure to read at grade level may be caused by several factors, including deficiencies in decoding (including phonemic awareness, phonemic decoding, and other word analysis skills), fluency, vocabulary, background knowledge, and inefficient use of comprehension strategies.

The report *Interventions for Adolescent Struggling Readers* (Scammacca et al., 2007) specifically addressed the research on reading instruction for adolescent struggling readers and offered research-based guidance for intervening with these students. Based on a meta-analysis of the research, the authors offered the following implications for practice (p. 1):

- Adolescence is not too late to intervene. Interventions do benefit older students.
- Older students with reading difficulties benefit from interventions focused at both the word and the text level.
- Older students with reading difficulties benefit from improved knowledge of word meanings and concepts.
- Word-study interventions are appropriate for older students struggling at the word level.
- Teachers can provide interventions that are associated with positive effects.
- Teaching comprehension strategies to older students with reading difficulties is beneficial.
- Older readers' average gains in reading comprehension are somewhat smaller than those in other reading



- and reading-related areas studied.
- Older students with learning disabilities benefit from reading intervention when it is appropriately focused.

To learn more about instructional conditions that could close the reading gap for struggling readers, we will need studies that provide instruction over longer periods of time and assess outcomes with measures more like those schools use to monitor reading progress of all students.

The report *What Content-Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy* (National Institute for Literacy, 2007) identified decoding and fluency as two basic reading components that are deficit areas for some struggling readers. It described each component, explained what good readers do and the challenges facing struggling readers, and presented implications for instruction.

*Decoding*, or *word identification*, refers to the ability to correctly decipher a particular word out of a group of letters. Two of the skills involved in decoding are phonemic awareness (understanding that spoken words are made up of individual sounds and the ability to identify and manipulate units of sound) and phonics (understanding the relationship between the letters in written words and their sounds when spoken).

**What good readers do:** Good readers have a conscious understanding of the individual sounds within spoken words and how they are manipulated to form words. With strong phonics skills they are able to use their knowledge of letters and their sounds to pronounce unknown words. They can rely on these skills to decode quickly unknown words that they encounter while reading.

**Challenges for struggling readers:** It is estimated that 10% of adolescents struggle with word identification skills. Some of these students may struggle with poor phonemic awareness skills, especially those students with dyslexia. Without sufficient awareness of the sounds in words, they are unable to develop phonics or fluency skills. Students who struggle with phonics lack effective strategies for decoding unknown multisyllabic words. This results in poor vocabulary growth and weakened comprehension.

**Implications for intervention instruction:** Students with decoding difficulties need intensive practice and instructional time to develop their phonics skills. Instruction should be direct, explicit, and systematic. It should emphasize sound–letter correspondence, syllable patterns, and morphology. This instruction should be provided by intervention specialists who have been trained to deliver decoding skills.

*Fluency* is the ability to read text accurately and smoothly with little conscious attention to the mechanics of reading.

**What good readers do:** Fluent readers read text with appropriate speed, accuracy, proper intonation, and proper expression. Some researchers have found a relationship between fluency and text comprehension.

**Challenges for struggling readers:** Struggling readers read slowly and often stop to sound out words. They may reread sections of texts to identify words and try to gain comprehension.

**Implications for intervention instruction:** Practice is an essential component of improving fluency. The following promote frequent and regular practice: provide models of fluent reading by reading aloud to students, engage students in repeated oral reading of texts, and engage students in guided oral reading and partner reading.

*Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents* (Torgesen et al., 2007) and the IES report (Kamil et al., 2008) also identified decoding as a possible area for intervention but added comprehension and text structure as possible areas for intervention for struggling readers:

- *Decoding skills*—Inadequate ability to decode printed text accurately and fluently may be one reason for poor comprehension. Interventions focused at the word level result in both improved reading accuracy and reading comprehension (Torgesen et al., 2007).
- *Content literacy skills*—With the exception of instruction in decoding and fluency, the content of effective literacy instruction for struggling readers is very similar to that recommended for students at or above grade level (i.e., comprehension strategies, vocabulary knowledge, instruction tied to improving content-area knowledge, and assignments that are motivating and engaging) (Kamil et al., 2008).
- *Comprehension strategies*—Educators can use multiple approaches to help struggling readers become more active and strategic readers. Strategy instruction should be explicit and include modeling, guided practice, feedback, and scaffolding. Student collaboration in comprehension strategies has also been shown to be helpful (Torgesen et al., 2007).
- *Text structure*—Helping students organize the information through the use of graphic organizers and

providing direct instruction on text structures and organizational patterns is helpful (Torgesen et al., 2007).

Finally, it has been suggested that a technology component should be part of instructional plans for adolescent students. Biancarosa and Snow pointed out that technology should be used as both an instructional tool and an instructional topic:

As a tool, technology can help teachers provide needed supports for struggling readers, including instructional reinforcement and opportunities for guided practice. For example, there are computer programs that help students improve decoding, spelling, fluency, and vocabulary and more programs are quickly being developed to address comprehension and writing. (2004, p. 19)

### English Language Learners

Two of the major adolescent literacy reports specifically address literacy instruction for ELLs: *Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents* (Torgesen et al., 2007) and *Double the Work* (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Torgesen et al. (2007) noted that literacy instruction for these students must consider the unique needs of this group and the individual differences among them. The variation in their learning needs is due to differences in age of arrival to the United States, educational history, native language ability and literacy, placement and instructional context in school, and sociocultural background. They identified three important principles to consider regarding literacy instruction for ELLs (pp. 91-93):

1. Research-based practices that have been identified to ensure the development of successful reading skills in monolingual students may also benefit ELLs.
2. ELLs draw on a host of linguistic, metacognitive, and experiential resources from their first language according to their proficiency level.
3. Curricular design and delivery for adolescent ELLs must follow the principles of differentiated instruction.

Torgesen et al. (2007) also pointed out that although there have been few empirical evaluations of instructional approaches specifically for adolescent ELLs, there is relevant research that can offer recommendations about effective instruction for ELLs (pp. 94–98):

- *Content-based language and literacy instruction:* Preparing all students, and especially ELLs, for academic reading tasks requires embedding literacy instruction in content-area classes.
- *Academic oral language and vocabulary:* Effective vocabulary instruction for adolescent ELL's should be explicit, systematic, extensive, and intensive. Teachers should provide both direct teaching of word meanings in meaningful contexts and teaching of word-learning strategies such as using context and word parts. In addition, depending on their native language and reading proficiency, some ELLs may benefit from strategies that draw on cognate knowledge (i.e., words with similar spellings in English as their native language).
- *Direct, explicit comprehension instruction:* As with native English speakers, research indicates that ELLs benefit from direct, explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies. Because of limited vocabularies and background knowledge, adolescent ELLs tend to be in even greater need of strategies.
- *Targeted interventions for ELLs with very limited literacy skills:* Effective interventions for adolescent ELLs who struggle with decoding words are similar to those found to be effective with younger children and native English speakers with decoding difficulties (i.e., systematic and explicit instruction in phonics).

Short and Fitzsimmons (2007) reiterated that many strategies for supporting literacy in native English speakers are applicable to adolescent ELLs. However, they emphasize that there are significant differences in the way that these interventions should be designed and implemented for ELLs. They refer to the title of their report, *Double the Work*, when they summarize the challenges facing ELLs:

It should be understood that adolescent ELLs are second language learners who are still developing their proficiency in academic English. Moreover, they are learning English at the same time they are studying core content areas through English. Thus, ELLs must perform double the work of native English speakers in the country's middle and high schools. And, at the same time, they are being held to the same accountability standards as their native English-speaking peers. (2007, p. 1).

For *Double the Work*, researchers were asked to review the literature on adolescent literacy and conduct site visits to three promising programs. In addition, researchers collected and analyzed information on the demographic trends and academic achievement of ELLs. A panel of researchers, policy makers, and practitioners reviewed the information and developed the following list of challenges to improving the literacy of ELLs, as well as potential solutions:

- Lack of common criteria for identifying ELLs and tracking their academic performance
- Lack of appropriate assessments
- Inadequate educator capacity for improving literacy in ELLs
- Lack of appropriate and flexible program options
- Inadequate use of research-based instructional practices
- Lack of a strong and coherent research agenda about adolescent ELL literacy

#### Literacy Motivation and Engagement

Motivation and self-directed learning was one of the instructional elements identified by *Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). The report noted that students become increasingly tuned out as they progress through upper grades, and it is therefore important to build student choices about the materials they read into the school day to keep them engaged. Providing relevancy to students' lives in what they read is another way to better engage them.

There is strong evidence that motivation and interest in reading decline after the elementary grades, especially for struggling readers (Torgesen et al., 2007; Kamil et al., 2008). The decline in motivation has two consequences that directly impact the growth of reading proficiency in adolescents. First, students with low interest in reading do not read as much as students with higher motivation, which affects the growth of vocabulary, background knowledge, and reading strategies. Second, these students tend to be less engaged when they do read, which also results in less use and growth of reading strategies (Torgesen et al., 2007).

*What Content-Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy* (National Institute for Literacy, 2007) addressed the role that motivation plays in developing successful adolescent readers and writers. The report noted, "An individual's goals, values, and beliefs regarding the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading affect students' motivation for reading.... Motivation also involves self-efficacy, or the belief that one is capable of success" (p. 34). Motivation contributes to reading engagement, and engaged readers tend to enjoy reading and read more often. Motivated adolescent readers are self-determined (i.e., they feel they have control over their reading); they self-regulate (i.e., they recognize if they are on task and employ strategies to achieve their goal); and they are engaged. The report also addressed factors that influence adolescents' motivation, including a change in their beliefs, values, and goals regarding school, and for struggling students, the effects of grading and grouping practices.

This report, as well as *Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents* (Torgesen et al., 2007), summarized the findings regarding motivational strategies used by teachers who successfully promote literacy in their students. Both reports supported the suggestion of Guthrie and Humenick (2004) to use three to five motivational enhancements, used in concert with one another. They noted that while there is no systematic research to determine which motivational elements are most powerful for specific students, teachers should follow the Guthrie et al. (2004) recommendation to first try to

- Focus students by setting clear goals and expectations for performance
- Guide students to focus on their own improvement
- Provide variety and choice in reading materials and assignments
- Provide opportunities for students to interact through reading

The fourth of five recommendations in the IES report is "increase student motivation and engagement in literacy learning" (Kamil et al., 2008, p. 7), and the report offered this advice:

To foster improvement in adolescent literacy, teachers should use strategies to enhance students' motivation to read and engagement in the learning process. Teachers should help students build confidence in their ability to comprehend and learn from content-area texts. They should provide a supportive environment that views mistakes as growth opportunities, encourages self-determination, and provides informational feedback about the usefulness of reading strategies and how the strategies can be modified to fit various tasks. Teachers should also make literacy experiences more relevant to students' interests, everyday life, or important current events. (p. 26)

The report explained that although the words motivation and engagement are often used interchangeably, they are not always synonymous. Motivation refers to the desire to become involved in a reading task, and engagement refers to the degree to which a student processes text deeply through the use of active learning strategies.

The conclusion reached by almost all of the adolescent literacy reports can be summed up by the following statement from *Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents*: “Even technically sound instructional techniques are unlikely to succeed unless we can ensure that, most of the time, students are engaged and motivated to understand what they read” (Torgesen et al., 2007, p. 11).

## **Assessment**

*Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) identified ongoing formative assessment of students and ongoing summative assessment of students and programs as the most foundational of all 15 elements it identified as essential to successful adolescent programs. The National Institute of Literacy made this point about the need for assessment that guides instruction for adolescents:

Effective instruction depends on sound instructional decision-making, which, in turn, depends on reliable data regarding students’ strengths and weakness, and progress in learning content and developing literacy. Adolescent reading difficulties may involve one or more literacy components... without assessments that are sensitive to the contributions of each component to overall reading ability, teachers will not be able to target their instruction to the skills and strategies most in need of improvement. (2007, p. 27)

What is the difference between different types of assessment? *Formative assessment*, which is often informal, assesses how students are progressing under current instructional practices. *Summative assessment* is more formal and provides data that are reported for accountability and research purposes. Screening and diagnostic assessments are also essential, particularly as tools to guide instructional decisions and intervention placement decisions for struggling readers and writers (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004).

The National Institute for Literacy (2007) report described summative assessments as those that provide important information about reading and subject-area achievements. They may include quizzes, chapter tests, district- and statewide tests, and standardized measures of reading. While summative assessments provide important data to assess overall academic achievement, formative and diagnostic assessments are needed to provide data for more informed decisions about literacy instruction. Formative assessments track students’ literacy development and can include teacher questioning, observation of reading strategies, classroom discussion, and the reading of students’ work. Diagnostic assessments provide a more precise understanding of individual students’ strengths and weaknesses. Diagnostic assessment is typically administered, scored, and interpreted by specialists, and these assessments are used to identify which specific reading and writing skills are weak.

The IES report (Kamil et al., 2008) noted that struggling readers can be identified by initial screening measures or consistently low scores on yearly reading tests. The report made the case that a second round of diagnostic assessment should be administered to determine a student’s specific needs. When this is not done, students may be assigned to an intervention class with students who may have different intervention instructional needs. The report recommended that a reliable method for identifying struggling readers should include, “an initial screening test or a threshold score on a required reading test and subsequent use of a diagnostic reading test that must be administered, scored, and interpreted by a specialist” (p. 34). Once the learning needs are identified, an intervention that provides an explicit instructional focus should be selected that targets the needs of the student.

## **Professional Development**

*Time to Act* identified teacher preparation and professional development as one of the major keys to successful adolescent literacy reform:

Determining what secondary school teachers need to know, ensuring they learn it, and supporting them in implementing that knowledge in classrooms is basic to achieving our goal of literacy for all... Good teachers of adolescent students not only understand their own content-areas deeply, they also understand the specific literacy challenges created by the texts they assign. Such teachers are prepared to address the content learning needs of struggling readers as well as on-grade level readers in their classes. (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010, p. 18)

*Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas* (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007, p. 1) concluded the following about

middle and high school content-area teachers:

- Their roles and responsibilities regarding literacy instruction should be clearly stated explicitly that they are not expected to provide basic intervention literacy instruction to struggling readers.
- They should identify the literacy skills that are essential to their content area, which they should be responsible for teaching.
- They must receive initial and ongoing professional development in teaching reading and writing skills that are essential to their content areas.

The report noted that at the secondary level the responsibility for teaching reading and writing often seems to belong to no one in particular. More often than not, content-area teachers see themselves first as specialists in their content area such as math, science, or history. While it is sometimes assumed that English teachers should be the ones to address reading skills, many of these teachers see themselves as experts in literature that requires reading and writing skills that are already in place.

If, as Heller and Greenleaf concluded, content literacy instruction must be a cornerstone of any comprehensive movement to build high-quality secondary schools, what kind of professional development is needed? The Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy (2010) suggested that improvements need to be made at both the preservice level (i.e., preparation of content-area teachers at the college level) and in-service professional development level (i.e., ongoing, quality training for new and experienced content-area teachers). It recommended that as a bare minimum, all middle and high school teachers should possess a working knowledge of (p. 20):

- How literacy demands change with age and grade
- How students vary in literacy strengths and needs
- How texts in a given content area raise specific literacy challenges
- How to recognize and address literacy difficulties
- How to adapt and develop teaching skills over time

*Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) identified professional development that is both long term and ongoing as an essential element of successful adolescent literacy programs. The report noted that professional development must be delivered as part of a systematic, long-term effort that supports everyone in a school building: classroom teachers, administrators, reading and intervention specialists, paraprofessionals, and librarians.

### **Literacy Planning and Policy Issues**

All of the adolescent literacy reports reviewed in this chapter concluded that literacy instruction does not end with the teaching of basic reading and writing skills in elementary schools and that all students need literacy instruction that is tied to content learning through high school. They also concluded that secondary school is not too late to help struggling readers and writers, but to ensure that students have the sophisticated literacy skills to succeed in college and the work force, concerted literacy planning efforts must take place at the school, district, state, and national levels.

*Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) noted that while instructional improvements can have a tremendous impact, they are more effective if they are implemented in conjunction with infrastructure supports. The report recommended the following infrastructure elements (pp. 4–5):

- *A comprehensive and coordinated literacy program*—interdisciplinary and interdepartmental that may even coordinate with out-of-school organizations and the local community
- *Leadership*—from principals and teachers who have a solid understanding of how to teach reading and writing to the full array of students present in schools
- *Teacher teams*—interdisciplinary teams that meet regularly to discuss students and align instruction

*Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas* (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007, pp. 25-29) also presented several key considerations that education leaders and policy makers should keep in mind as they make policy decisions:

- The roles and responsibilities of content-area teachers must be clear and consistent.
- Every academic discipline should define its own essential literacy skills.

- All secondary school teachers should receive initial and ongoing professional development in the literacy of their own content areas.
- Content-area teachers need positive incentives and appropriate tools to provide reading and writing instruction.

*Time to Act* (The Carnegie Council on Advancing Literacy, 2010) stressed the vital role that policy makers at the school, district, state, and federal levels must play in reengineering the nation's schools to support adolescent literacy. The report made recommendations for reengineering for change at the school, district and state levels (see Table 17.2).

**Table 17.2**

#### Recommendations for Re-Engineering for Change

From *Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success* (Carnegie Council on Advanced Adolescent Literacy (2010)

- At the school level
  - The school culture is organized for learning
  - Assessment information drives decisions
  - Resources are allocated wisely
  - Instructional leadership is strong
  - Professional faculty is committed to student success
  - Targeted interventions are provided for struggling readers and writers
  - All content area classes are permeated by a strong literacy focus
- At the district level
  - Organize to promote a culture of learning
  - Use information to drive decisions
  - Allocate resources to support learning priorities
  - Build human capacity
  - Ensure the provision of targeted interventions for struggling readers and writers
- At the state level
  - Institutionalize adolescent literacy
  - Revise standards
  - Develop and revise assessments
  - Improve data collection and use
  - Align instruction with standards and assessments
  - Support targeted interventions for struggling readers and writers
  - Improve human capacity across the state

### LITERACY PLANNING MODEL FOR GRADES 4–12

Given the information presented thus far in this chapter, the establishment of school and districtwide literacy plans is an obvious first step toward meeting the literacy needs of all students in Grades 4–12. In order to deliver appropriate content and intervention literacy instruction, an assessment plan must be in place to determine the specific needs of individual students. Solutions to scheduling and grouping issues must be addressed in order to find time in the daily schedule to deliver intervention instruction. Finally, a long-term plan for professional development is also necessary to provide classroom teachers, specialists, and administrators the essential information they need in order to play their role in the literacy plan.

The last section of this chapter reviews the Keys to Literacy Planning Model for Grades 4–12 (Sedita, 2004, 2009). The model has been used with a number of schools in New England to develop upper elementary, middle, and high school literacy plans. The Keys to Literacy Planning Model is organized around six essential planning components, each of which is addressed in Table 17.3.

**Table 17.3**

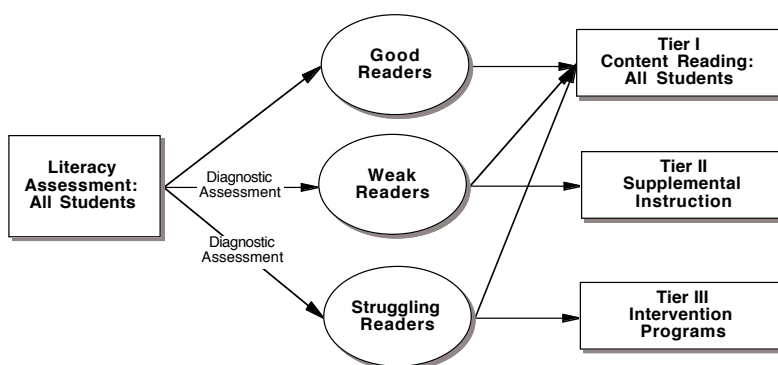
## Keys to Literacy Planning: A Model for Grades 4-12 (Sedita, 2004, 2009)

1. Establishment of a literacy planning team
2. Assessment planning for screening, guiding instruction and progress monitoring
3. Literacy instruction in the content classroom
4. Interventions for struggling readers that address phonics, word study, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension skills
5. Flexible scheduling to allow for grouping based on instructional needs
6. Professional development planning

It is important to note that these components are interrelated; plans that are made for one component will affect the other components. Likewise, a plan for one component will not be successful if the other components are not simultaneously addressed. For example, if an assessment plan is developed and used to group students on the basis of instructional need but scheduling and grouping issues are not addressed, the assessment data cannot be acted on. A plan to incorporate content literacy instruction will not be successful if the professional development needs of content-area teachers are not also addressed.

Included in the model is a three-tiered framework for delivering literacy instruction that is guided by assessment data (Sedita, 2008), represented by the graphic organizer in Figure 17.1.

Figure 17.1



This three-tiered framework is similar to those used in the implementation of response to intervention models (Aaron & Joshi, 2009; Burns, 2008). As noted in the adolescent literacy reports summarized previously, content-area teachers must play a role in improving the literacy skills of all adolescent students, but struggling readers and writers will also need intervention instruction. The framework begins with screening assessments to determine which students are on or above-grade level with reading and writing skills. A second round of diagnostic assessment is given to those students not on grade level to determine how severe their needs are and which skills require remediation. Based on individual needs, students receive literacy instruction across these three tiers:

- *Tier I—Content Literacy:* Instruction for all students that addresses background knowledge, content vocabulary, comprehension strategies, goals for reading, and the reading/writing connection using classroom materials taught by content-area teachers in content classrooms.
- *Tier II—Supplemental:* Instruction for weak readers with slightly below grade-level reading skills (up to 1 year below grade level) that addresses general vocabulary growth, additional practice of comprehension strategies, advanced word study, or fluency using supplemental materials taught by ELA teachers or trained specialists in extra literacy classes or extended ELA blocks.
- *Tier III—Intervention:* Intensive instruction for struggling students who are more than 1 year below grade level in literacy skills that addresses decoding, spelling, language structures, significant vocabulary growth, or comprehension strategies using intervention materials taught by trained specialists in small-group or individual settings.

## The Six Components of the Keys to Literacy Planning Model

This section discusses the six components of the Keys to Literacy Planning Model in more detail.

### 1. Establishment of a Literacy Planning Team

In order to develop a schoolwide literacy plan, a literacy planning team must be assembled. There are several ingredients to a successful team: strong leadership, literacy expertise, representation from all stakeholders, good organization, communication, and team-building skills. The involvement of all stakeholders is essential, including administrators, classroom teachers, and specialists. Because content-area teachers will be asked to play a large role in literacy instruction, there should be representation from content-area teachers. Sarason reinforced the importance of having content-area teachers as part of the team:

When a process makes people feel that they have a voice in matters that affect them, they will have a greater commitment to the overall enterprise and will take greater responsibility for what happens to the enterprise. The absence of such a process insures that no one feels responsible, that blame will always be directed externally, and adversarialism will be a notable feature of school life. (1990, p. 61)

It is also important to recognize that literacy planning is a process, not an event. Like most schoolwide initiatives, developing and executing a literacy plan will take time and sustained effort; literacy planning teams should be prepared for the process to take 1–3 years. Fullan (2001) identified three phases of planning that are necessary to ensure long-term success of a school reform such as literacy planning.

- **Initiation** is the period in which a plan is developed and a decision to move forward is made. During this phase, educators develop a set of ideals, goals, and policies that will promote unity of purpose around what students should learn, how they should learn it, and how the school and personnel must be organized to meet the needs of the students for the initiative.
- **Implementation** is the process of putting the literacy plan into practice, typically spanning 1–3 years. Because parts of the initiative may be new to the people expected to participate in it, it is unrealistic to assume that all implementers will wholeheartedly embrace the initiative, but, with support, practice, and accountability, belief systems begin to change. Administrators, teachers, and students eventually begin to see progress and the positive effects of the initiative. This phase requires time, effort, and clarity of purpose. Sometimes there can be an implementation dip: Things get worse before they get better as people grapple with the meaning and skills of change. Even with the best initiation planning, implementers will experience bumps in the road.
- **Continuance** is the process of institutionalizing the literacy initiative. The infrastructure, policies, and mutual accountability developed in the initiation and implementation phases will determine whether the initiative is sustained beyond the initial implementation. Careful planning up to this stage helps the initiative survive budget cuts and changes in personnel. The major challenge at this stage is for administration to continue overt support. As implementation moves toward continuance, it is easy to assume the initiative does not need attention. Teachers may drift and come and go, and the gains made begin to diminish.

The Keys to Literacy Planning Model draws on Fullan's school reform planning model by organizing the literacy planning and implementation process into five phases. The first three steps occur in the first year. The last two take place in the second year and beyond.

1. *Initiation Stage (1–2 months)*: Assemble a representative literacy planning team, learn about literacy.
2. *Self-Assessment Stage (1–3 months)*: Gather data and information to determine the current status related to assessment, content and intervention literacy instruction, professional development, scheduling and grouping, and school resources. Identify gaps and needs.
3. *Planning Stage (1–3 months)*: Develop a literacy plan that sets goals for the areas noted above and includes action steps to be taken to reach those goals.
4. *Implementation Stage (2–3 years)*: Create an ongoing literacy implementation team. Follow through on each action step of the plan. Adjust the details of the plan if needed.
5. *Continuance Stage (ongoing)*: Institutionalize the plan to ensure sustainability. Revisit the plan on an annual basis.



## 2. Assessment Planning for Screening, Guiding Instruction, and Progress Monitoring

One of the most important components of a schoolwide literacy plan is the development of a complete and efficient assessment plan. As noted earlier in this chapter, literacy assessments play an important role in instruction decision-making. In *Creating a Culture of Literacy: A Guide for Middle and High School Principals*, the National Association of Secondary School Principals noted the following about the purpose of assessment for literacy planning:

The goal of a school's assessment efforts should be to provide a clear picture of student strengths and weaknesses, teacher professional development needs, and the school's capacity to support a school literacy program. To meet this goal, the school will need to develop a balanced assessment program that uses both formal and informal measures of achievement in gathering data to determine the success of the program. (2005, p. 19)

Torgesen and Miller made this point about different types of assessment:

Assessments *of* learning, frequently referred to as summative assessments, indicate how well students have learned, or how well they can meet the performance standards in a subject area such as reading or math.... Assessments *for* learning, in contrast, are designed to help teachers provide more effective instruction so that individual students can improve their learning, or so that more students can reach acceptable performance standards. (2009, p. 5)

Assessments *for* learning, also described as *formative assessments*, should be the focus for literacy planning. Formative assessments include screening (to determine which students are having reading and writing difficulty), diagnostic (to determine why students are having difficulty), and progress monitoring assessments (to determine if students are making progress with the instructional practices that are being used).

By the time students reach upper elementary grades and beyond, assumptions are often made that students have the literacy skills necessary to learn. It is therefore essential to screen all students at least once a year to determine if their literacy skills are keeping up with grade-level requirements. Many schools rely solely on high-stakes state assessments, but these are not the best screening tools. While they offer a broad picture of who may be struggling to read, they do not provide sufficient data to determine which students are reading at grade level, which are not, and why. Figure 17.2 illustrates a recommended model for assessment planning that begins with the assessment of all students but progressively assesses fewer students at each stage.

In Step 1, use a screening assessment with all students to determine who is reading at or above grade level and who is not. Use a standardized, group-administered, and norm-referenced assessment that measures reading comprehension as well as vocabulary, if possible. Students who perform at or above grade level on this measure do not require additional assessment unless there is something that would indicate a student may have weak reading skills despite performing well on the standardized measure (e.g., the student has received special education services for a number of years because of a reading disability). Literacy instruction for these students should be provided in the content areas in vocabulary and comprehension by all teachers.

In Step 2, for those students who are not reading on grade level or for whom there are some questions as noted previously, use a series of diagnostic assessments to determine which reading components are contributing to difficulty with comprehension of grade-level material. This might include underlying difficulty with decoding skills (phonics, fluency), background knowledge, insufficient vocabulary knowledge, or a lack of metacognitive comprehension strategies. Start with an assessment that measures oral reading fluency rates. If students are hitting grade-level benchmarks for fluency, further diagnostic assessment to determine if there are phonics weaknesses is not necessary. Literacy instruction for these students should be provided in the content areas as noted in Step 1 and may also need to include supplemental instruction that provides more explicit instruction and guided practice in vocabulary and comprehension.

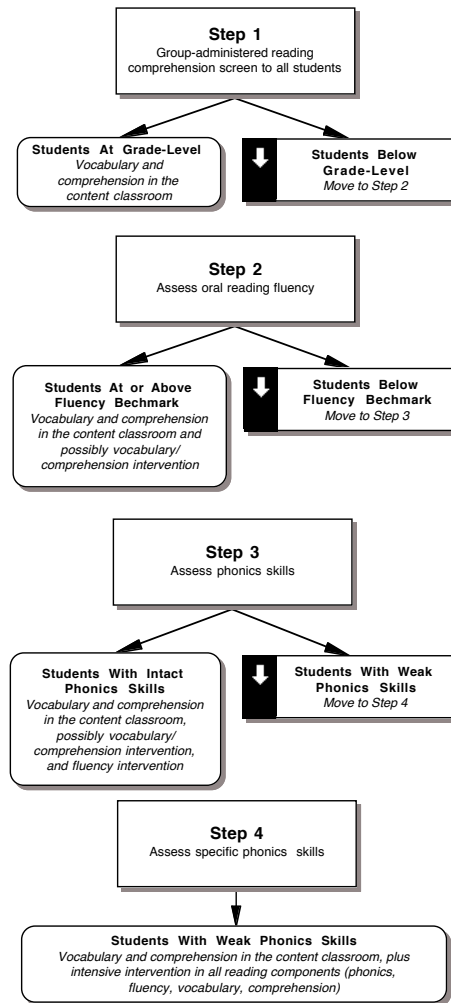
In Step 3, for those students who are not reading on grade level and who do not meet fluency benchmarks, use diagnostic assessments to determine if there is an underlying weakness in phonics skills. Formal and informal phonics screeners and diagnostic spelling assessments can be used for this purpose. If students do not have weaknesses in phonics skills, they do not require additional diagnostic assessments. In addition to receiving literacy instruction in the content areas as noted in Step 1, these students should also receive fluency intervention instruction, and they may also need supplemental instruction that provides more explicit instruction and guided practice in

vocabulary and comprehension.

In Step 4, for those students who are not reading on grade level, who do not meet fluency benchmarks, and who show weaknesses in phonics skills, use diagnostic assessments to determine exactly where the breakdown in the phonics scope and sequence occurs. In addition to receiving literacy instruction in the content areas as noted in Step 1, these students will also require significant intervention in the areas of phonics, fluency, and most likely vocabulary and comprehension.

**Figure 17.2**

**Literacy Assessment Plan for Grades 4-12**



When developing an assessment plan, be sure to prepare for the following:

- Sufficient professional development regarding the importance of using assessment to guide instruction and how to interpret data
- Adequate time and resources to administer assessments
- Sufficient personnel to administer assessments
- A procedure to review the data to guide instructional decisions

### 3. Literacy Instruction in the Content Classroom

The third component of the literacy plan should be the establishment of goals for content literacy instruction. As students progress from intermediate through high school grades, they must continue to build on their

basic reading skills to meet ever-increasing literacy demands. Compared to earlier grades, they must learn from texts that are significantly longer and more complex at the word, sentence, and structural levels; require greater fluency; and demand much-greater ability to synthesize information. However, content-area teachers often expect that once students have learned basic reading skills they will be able to readily apply them as they move through the grades (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010).

### *Vocabulary*

Content vocabulary instruction is necessary because of the vast number of words students must acquire each year in order to read and understand grade-level text. If students do not adequately and steadily build their vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension will be affected (Chall & Jacobs, 2003). Estimates vary of how many words students must learn every year, ranging from 2,000 to 3,500 words per year after Grade 3 (Anderson & Nagy, 1992; Beck & McKeown, 1991).

Explicit instruction in specialized, content vocabulary such as in science or social studies has been identified as an important way to contribute to successful reading comprehension among adolescent students, and it enhances their ability to acquire textbook vocabulary (Kamil et al., 2008). In addition, Pressley, Disney, and Anderson (2007) found that students comprehend more when they are taught vocabulary taken from text they are reading. Direct and indirect methods for teaching vocabulary were presented earlier in this chapter.

### *Comprehension*

Research indicates that teachers who provide comprehension strategy instruction that is deeply connected within the context of subject matter learning, such as history and science, foster comprehension development (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Snow, 2002). If students learn that strategies are tools for understanding the conceptual context of text, then the strategies become more purposeful and integral to reading activities. Unless the strategies are closely linked with knowledge and understanding in a content area, students are unlikely to learn the strategies fully, may not perceive the strategies as valuable tools, and are less likely to use them in new learning situations with new text. In their summary of the research on secondary school teaching specific to reading, Alvermann and Moore (1991) concluded that the use of strategies such as taking notes, mapping, and paraphrasing should be built into the curriculum of all content areas and that it is a program outcome for which all educators are responsible.

The National Reading Panel (2000) identified the following comprehension strategies as being most effective for improving comprehension:

- *Comprehension monitoring*—Readers approach text with a sense of purpose and adjust how they read.
- *Use of graphic semantic organizers (including story maps)*—Readers create or complete graphic or spatial representations of the topics and main ideas in text.
- *Question answering and generation*—Readers ask and answer questions before, during, and after reading. They learn to consider what type of question is being asked according to a framework and to anticipate test questions they may be asked.
- *Summarization*—Readers select and paraphrase the main ideas of expository text and integrate those ideas into a brief paragraph or several paragraphs that capture the most important propositions or ideas in the reading.
- *Cooperative learning*—Students learn strategies together through peer interaction, dialogue with each other, and with the teacher in whole-group activities.
- 

Suggestions for comprehension strategy instruction were presented earlier in this chapter.

### *Other Content Literacy Skills*

In addition to vocabulary and comprehension strategies, morphology, extended discussion of text meaning, and writing skills were addressed previously in this chapter. There is another aspect of content literacy that also supports the case for making content-area teachers part of the solution to improving literacy achievement. After the elementary years, reading assignments become increasingly varied in their style, vocabulary, text structure, purpose, and intended audience (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Science textbooks differ from math textbooks. Reading in history can range from a textbook, to a primary source, to an editorial in the newspaper. Reading literature can include multiple genres such as poetry, short story, and fable. Content-area teachers are in the best position to teach students how to read and write in their subject areas (Jetton & Alexander, 2004; Stahl & Shanahan, 2004).

#### 4. Interventions for Struggling Readers that Address Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension Skills

One of the most important components of a literacy plan is the development of a plan for assigning students to supplemental and intervention instruction settings and identifying research-based intervention programs and highly trained specialists to take on the tasks of intensive literacy instruction for students with severe difficulties.

As noted previously, failure to read at grade level may be caused by several factors or combinations of factors, including skill deficiency in the following: phonemic awareness, phonetic decoding and word analysis skills that support word reading accuracy, text reading fluency, strategies for building vocabulary, strategies for understanding and using the specific textual features that distinguish different genres, and self-regulated use of reading comprehension (Kamil et al., 2008). As a result, some students may need word-level interventions, including systematic training in decoding skills. Other students may require an intervention targeting the development of fluency skills. For comprehension and vocabulary, the level of instruction struggling students receive in their content-area classes may not be intense enough. They may require more direct and explicit instruction in these areas with significantly more guided practice.

There are several obstacles to providing appropriate interventions. First, it may be difficult to find the resources to administer diagnostic assessments. Second, schools often do not have the funds to hire specialists who are trained to deliver intervention instruction or to purchase research-based intervention programs. However, assuming the resources are available, older struggling readers can often learn to read if, “the teacher is well prepared and supported, and the students are given time, sufficiently intensive instruction, and incentives to overcome their reading and language challenges” (Moats, 2001, p. 11). Development of a schoolwide literacy plan often results in the identification and reallocation of existing resources to support intervention instruction.

#### 5. Flexible Scheduling to Allow for Grouping Based on Instructional Needs

A challenge of secondary literacy planning is finding the time to schedule supplemental and intervention literacy instruction and how to group students based on their individual needs for that instruction. In early elementary grades, when students are with the same teacher throughout the day and a significant block of time is devoted to reading instruction for all students, it is much easier to apply flexible grouping techniques to deliver targeted supplemental and intervention literacy instruction. There is also a greater chance that the classroom teacher will have a paraprofessional or specialist available for part of the day to assist with flexible grouping. This is often not the case at the middle and high school levels.

##### *Time for Intervention*

McEwan (2001) noted that in order to raise student achievement schools must allocate sufficient instructional time to reading, particularly for those students who are well below grade level, and then use every minute of that time wisely. However, the typical scheduling patterns at middle and high schools create significant obstacles to identifying time in the school day for literacy instruction beyond that which can be embedded in content-area instruction. By the middle grades, it is assumed that students will have basic reading skills, so there is often no class period designed to specifically teach reading. It is sometimes assumed that ELA classes should be used for supplemental reading instruction, but teachers of these classes understandably note that the literature content that they must cover does not provide time to teach basic reading.

What is the solution? Every school has a unique set of circumstances that may enable it to consider certain options for intervention time. The following list contains possible options to include in a schoolwide literacy plan:

- Extend the period of time allocated for ELA class to devote some class instruction to specific literacy skills.
- Develop teacher schedules to include opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively to plan and assess teaching strategies based on student assessment data (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2005).
- Consider reorganizing the schedule and class offerings (e.g., move to alternate or block scheduling, change the length of class time by reducing or increasing number of classes in the day).
- Provide literacy electives for struggling learners that replace other electives or foreign language.
- Standardize curriculum frameworks for which literacy skills will be taught in various subject areas.
- Consider organizing time under a block schedule so all teachers can devote additional time to basic reading skills in addition to delivering content.
- For intervention classes, consider developing a parallel schedule when these classes are taught at the same time of day so students can flexibly move from one group to another based on their progress (Allain, 2008).
- Use after school or Saturdays to conduct tutoring to small groups (McEwan, 2001).

### *Grouping for Intervention*

Balancing various course requirements and myriad complexities during the typical secondary scheduling process makes it difficult to group struggling readers together who have similar instructional needs. As a result, when students are assigned to intervention periods, they often find themselves grouped with students who are at different levels or who need different types of literacy interventions. Added to this is a tendency for teachers, students, and their parents to want to use intervention time to help students with homework or study for tests instead of focusing on improving literacy skills. This hinders the ability to target intervention instruction to the individual needs of each student plus be diligent about monitoring progress.

Another factor that results in inappropriate grouping for intervention is that assessment data is not available or used to determine which students need literacy intervention, which literacy skills are areas of need, or how to best group students with similar areas of need. The report of the Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy pointed out:

In very few secondary schools is student assessment data used as a basis for assignment to classes—sometimes because such data is not available, but more often because convenience-based scheduling defeats the effort. Many schools that do use assessment data as a basis for assigning classes simply assign students to lower and higher tracks, rather than offering targeted instruction to meet struggling students' needs while making sure that all students receive the same instruction in core academic areas. (2010, p. 4)

Regarding mixed-ability grouping versus similar-ability grouping, McEwan (2001) said that students need specialized instruction, and they need the opportunity to work in groups that reflect the heterogeneity of their school campus. “By the time students reach high school, they may differ by as many as six grade levels in their academic abilities” (p. 27). McEwan further noted that a review of the literature on grouping and student achievement reveals no valid research studies supporting the position that mixed-ability groups are always more effective.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the provision of common and fair accommodations for students identified with learning disabilities. This includes extra time on tests, shortened reading assignments, the use of digitized materials for reading, universal design technology and software, and even someone to read aloud to students. These are all parts of interventions that should be available for struggling readers along with intensified instruction outlined previously.

### 6. Professional Development Planning

The final essential component to a successful literacy plan is a long-term plan for the provision of literacy professional development to classroom teachers, intervention teachers, and administrators. Without appropriate professional development, plans for delivering literacy instruction to both good and struggling readers are unlikely to be sustained or even initially implemented effectively (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). A major finding of the National Reading Panel (2000) was that professional development is essential for teachers to develop knowledge of comprehension strategies and to learn how to teach and model strategy use. The findings of the RAND Reading Study Group (Snow, 2002) underscored the importance of teacher preparation to deliver effective instruction in reading comprehension strategies, especially when the students are low performing.

Heller and Greenleaf (2007) concluded that the greatest challenge to addressing adolescent literacy has to do with the scarcity of ongoing, high-quality professional development for teachers. This lack of literacy professional development begins at the preservice level, where preparation for middle and high school teaching typically prioritizes content knowledge and gives insufficient attention to the role literacy plays within a content area. Teachers often enter the classroom assuming their students already possess all of the reading and writing skills they need to learn (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010).

A lack of quality, meaningful literacy professional development continues at the in-service level. While there are many workshops and textbooks dedicated to content literacy, relatively few of the nation's secondary school teachers have had meaningful opportunities to learn about the reading and writing practices that go on in their own content area (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). The National Association of Secondary School Principals made this observation:

Much of the professional development in U.S. schools is of the one-off variety—popular speakers are invited to provide motivational jolts, or publishers are invited to provide curriculum overviews. Taking student data as the basis for professional work, linking the achievement data to proposed instructional activities, discussing ways to provide instruction across content areas and across years in a manner that is coherent and

leads to cumulative results, and engaging in peer observation and evaluation of instruction are relatively rare activities in the nation's schools, yet these activities constitute the most effective approach to instructional improvement." (2005, pp. 4–5)

More optimistically, though, Heller and Greenleaf (2007) pointed out that when content-area teachers receive intensive and ongoing professional support, many of them find a way to emphasize reading and writing in their classes. This chapter's author has experienced this first-hand through her work with the delivery of literacy professional development to teachers in Grades 4–12. A survey of teachers participating in long-term, building-based professional development in the areas of comprehension, vocabulary, and writing found that more than 90% report integrating at least two content literacy strategies on a consistent basis in their classroom teaching as a result of the training (Keys to Literacy, 2009).

### **Closing Thoughts About Literacy Planning for Grades 4–12**

There is no simple, one-size-fits-all model for improving literacy achievement in intermediate through high school grades. Each school has a unique combination of administrators, teachers, students, community support, and resources that must be considered when developing a schoolwide literacy plan. The time, effort, and expertise needed to develop effective, sustainable literacy plans that meet the needs of both good and struggling adolescent readers are significant and present a challenge. The good news is that more attention than ever before is beginning to focus on the literacy needs of these students, including the possibility of increased funding to support adolescent literacy planning and instruction. The time is right, and the challenge is worth accepting.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT ADOLESCENT LITERACY**

In just 10 years, we have learned significantly more about effective teaching of reading and writing skills beyond Grade 3. We have also identified the toll that having significant numbers of adolescent students with below grade-level literacy skills takes on high school graduation rates, success in college, and preparedness for the work force. There are numerous web sites and organizations such as the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Center on Instruction that educators can turn to for information about adolescent literacy. There are also a number of research reviews and reports available such as those made possible by funding from sources such as the Carnegie Corporation and the federal government (e.g., Institute of Education Science, the National Institute for Literacy). There is still more we have to learn about how to support content-area teachers to embed literacy instruction in their classrooms, which intervention programs are most effective for struggling readers, and what we can do to address the needs of ELLs. However, research since 2000 has produced enough knowledge about what works so that there should be no delay in applying this knowledge at the classroom, school, and district levels. The following quote from the report of the Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy provides a challenging but attainable goal: "To reach the goal of providing quality literacy instruction for all our nation's adolescents, we must systematically link instruction to the growing knowledge base on literacy and inform it with up-to-date data relating to outcomes and best practices" (2010, p. x). This chapter has attempted to provide readers with the knowledge base necessary to inform their instructional practices.

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