



Stateline: Can Those Tweens and Teens Read Yet?

Author(s): Kathy Christie

Source: *The Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 89, No. 9 (May, 2008), pp. 629-630, 703

Published by: Phi Delta Kappa International

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20442593>

Accessed: 20-10-2016 00:44 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



Phi Delta Kappa International is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Phi Delta Kappan*

STATELINE

Can Those Tweens and Teens Read Yet?

BY KATHY CHRISTIE

AS students transition from the elementary grades into middle school and high school, it is taken for granted that they can read at least close to grade level. Insightful teachers, however, often find that to be far from true. Out of a class of 25, three students might not decode words well, five might have a problem with fluency, and another five might read aloud just fine but look up with deer-in-the-headlights eyes when asked to recap what they've read, because they don't know.

Teachers know these things, but most don't know what to do about it. Most teachers who were trained to teach secondary English know how to teach such literature-related concepts as theme and character development, but they don't necessarily know how to teach kids to decode. As a high school English teacher who moved to a middle school to teach reading and language arts to fifth- and sixth-graders, I was that deer in the headlights when it came to helping kids at the lowest level learn to read.

Over a year ago, I wrote about the need for states to address adolescent literacy. The National Governors Association and the Alliance for Excellent Education had just begun to push leaders' thinking on this issue. Since that time, however, state policies designed to ensure that teens and "tweens" read at grade level have not exactly been filling my in-basket. So to help gin up some interest across the legislatures, researchers at the Education Commission of the States added adolescent literacy as one of the measures to include in the ECS High School Policy Center database. Over the past year, researcher Melodye Bush scoured state policy. What follows is a summary of her findings.

EFFORTS REFLECTIVE OF STATE LEADERSHIP

State office or central coordination. The presence

■ *KATHY CHRISTIE is vice president for Knowledge Management and the ECS Clearinghouse, Education Commission of the States, Denver.*

of a designated state office or coordinator can reflect a strong level of commitment and help ensure that a focus on adolescent reading and literacy is not pushed aside in favor of other priorities. The Just Read, Florida! office, for example, was legislatively created within the state department of education in 2006. In New York, the Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Instructional Technology works with the Office of Early Education and Reading Initiatives to support increased adolescent literacy achievement. The Ohio Reading Improvement Office is housed in the state department of education and facilitates communications within the government to ensure alignment across the state's literacy and teacher training activities. The office also offers professional development, provides an online adolescent literacy journal, and runs a grant competition to fund research-based literacy programs in low-performing secondary schools.

In Rhode Island, the State Literacy Advisory Panel provides advice concerning literacy programs and efforts. In Virginia, two state-level staffers coordinate adolescent literacy for the state. In addition to creating Just Read, Florida!, the Florida legislature established the Florida Center for Reading Research, which disseminates information through the Florida Progress Monitoring and Reporting Network.

Clear standards, expectations. Clear, rigorous standards can help staff members understand what students in grades 4-12 should know and be able to do. Challenging standards improve efficiency, generate challenging and cohesive curriculum, and become the basis for holding students, teachers, and schools accountable. Standards are the launching pad for redesigning curriculum, assessment, accountability, teacher education, professional development, and resource allocation. Yet only a dozen states have standards explicitly reflecting literacy expectations.

Building momentum and monitoring progress. State efforts to raise K-3 reading skills can founder in later grades if effective teaching of reading is neglected in the middle and secondary grades. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly half of the undergraduates enrolled in remedial classes in 2000 took remedial writing, and 35% took remedial reading. Meanwhile, literacy demands for today's work force have accelerated and will continue to do so, and only a handful of states appear to have established reporting requirements for how well efforts to improve literacy are going. In Illinois, for example, the state superintendent is required to report annually to the leadership of the legislature on the results of the Continued Reading Improvement Block Grant Program and the progress

STATELINE

being made in improving the reading skills of students in grades 7 through 12.

EFFORTS TO BUILD STAFF CAPACITY

Principals. As instructional leaders, principals should be leading the charge to improve student literacy, but many have never considered it a core part of their work. And secondary principals are less likely than elementary leaders to do so. However, administrative support is crucial to make change happen and to ensure that the focus remains on literacy efforts across the content areas.

Teachers. State policy could support mentoring or induction programs with a literacy component for middle and high school teachers. However, only four states appear to have included literacy in their statewide mentoring or induction programs. In North Carolina, Gov. Mike Easley has established a literacy coaching program that will identify 100 schools with the lowest-performing eighth grades. These schools will each select one teacher to receive training from the state teacher academy to become a literacy coach. In Kentucky, state law provides for the training of reading coaches and mentors to complement other statewide reading initiatives, with priority given to teachers in grades 4 through 12.

Traditionally, secondary teacher certification programs have not prepared teachers to teach reading or to intervene when students are reading below grade level. Eliminating reading difficulties also requires the integration of literacy training across the content areas. However, only 19 states appear to have strengthened their teacher preparation and certification requirements to reflect the need for skills in supporting adolescent literacy.

But most classroom teachers are not rookies. So how many states are providing professional development in adolescent literacy instruction? Thirteen states now do.

There are several reasons for offering this training: 1) secondary school teachers who have been in the classroom for a number of years might not have received preservice training on teaching reading or detecting precise reading-related problems; 2) professional development provides new tools to address adolescent literacy; 3) schoolwide professional development for teachers and principals allows a building-level focus on analyzing student performance data, matching instruction to student needs, promoting collaboration, and assigning school personnel specific roles to support literacy improvement. The research on professional development is clear: training must be systemic and sustained, and it must be more than a one-time workshop.

In Idaho, state policy requires that in order to be recertified, Title I, special education, and K-8 teachers and administrators must take a three-credit course called "Idaho Comprehensive Literacy" or pass an assessment measuring their knowledge of teaching literacy, based on the Idaho comprehensive literacy plan. Kentucky education laws include provisions for the training of reading coaches, and Texas has established teacher reading academies.

In Rhode Island, legislation passed in 2000 established a panel to review the research on how reading is learned and on the knowledge and skills necessary for teachers to deliver effective reading instruction. The aim was to develop a statewide "reading success institute" for educators. In Texas, by 1 June 2008, the commissioner of education is required to establish academies for teachers who provide reading instruction for students in grades 6-8.

STUDENT SUPPORTS

Diagnosis. States could require students performing below proficiency on state reading assessments to be targeted for diagnostic reading assessments. Only 12
(Continued on page 703)



PHI DELTA KAPPA
INTERNATIONAL
OFFICE STAFF

WILLIAM J. BUSHAW, Executive Director;
JEANNE STORM, Associate Executive
Director; AMANDA GRAHAM, Director of the
Future Educators Association (FEA); MARCIA
KAZMIERZAK, Director of Information
Technology; AMY KEMP, Director of
Membership; LYNN LEWIS, Director of
Development; DELAINE McCULLOUGH,
Director of Marketing and Communications;
CATHY RUF, Director of Office Operations;
BILLIE SPELLMAN, Director of Chapter
Relations; ERIN YOUNG, Director of
Publications and New Media; JAMIE COBB,
Network Administrator, Information
Technology; CONNIE McCOY, Coordinator
of Chapter Programs and Services; MONICA

OVERMAN, Professional Development
Coordinator; THOMAS ULMET,
Teacher2Teacher Coordinator; DEBBIE
WEBB, Marketing and Communications
Coordinator.

Phi Delta Kappa International is headquar-
ters for:

INTERNATIONAL CURRICULUM
MANAGEMENT AUDIT CENTER
FUTURE EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION

INTERNATIONAL BOARD

JOHN KENNETH AMATO, Pres.; Principal,
Maple Place Middle School, 2 Maple
Place, Oceanport, NJ 07757.
SANDEE CROWTHER, Pres.-Elect,
Admin., Ret.; 1230 W. 29th Court,
Lawrence, KS 66046.
JO ANN FUJIOKA, Past Pres.; Area

Admin., Ret., 540 S. Forest St., #K,
Denver, CO 80246.

KATHLEEN M. ANDRESON, Representative,
Reg. A; Owner, The Synergy Group, Ltd.,
7604 Summer N.E., Albuquerque, NM
87110.

ROBERT L. MEYERS, Representative, Reg.
B; Admin., Ret.; 6417 S. 92nd St.,
Omaha, NE 68127.

PATRICIA WILLIAMS, Representative, Reg.
C; Professor, Sam Houston State Univ.;
1908 Bobby K. Marks Blvd., Huntsville, TX
77341-2119.

RONALD N. STRAHANOSKI,
Representative, Reg. D; Admin., Ret.;
1019 Runyan Dr., Lockport, IL 60441.

GERARD LONSWAY, Representative, Reg.
E; Admin., Ret.; 5447 Bayshore Rd.,
Oregon, OH 43618.

OTELIA FRAZIER, Representative, Reg. F;

Elementary Principal, Ret., and Adjunct
Professor, George Mason Univ.; 9912 Par
Dr., Nokesville, VA 20181.

CHRISTIAN H. CHÉRAU, Representative,
Reg. G; Evaluation Consultant, P.O. Box
2907, Tybee Island, GA 31328.

FRANK H. NAPPI, JR., Representative, Reg.
H; NYC High School Principal, Ret., and
Adjunct Professor of Mathematics, Nassau
Community College; 29 Holiday Park Dr.,
Williston Park, NY 11596.

BERNADINE E. MOLDOSCH, Representative,
Reg. I; Principal, Thomas Jefferson Elem.
School; 250 Athens Blvd., Buffalo, NY
14223-1604.

YONG ZHAO, At-Large Representative;
University Distinguished Professor and
Director, U.S.-China Center for Research
on Educational Excellence, Michigan State
University, East Lansing.

cited the Sixth Circuit's decision, the Seventh Circuit has since affirmed the dismissal of a suit by two Illinois districts based on the purported conflict between NCLB and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).⁷ Moreover, although the NEA and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) are lobbying for dramatic increases in NCLB Title I funding before the current Congress, the many forces seeking modification or elimination of NCLB have largely created a stalemate with regard to the future of the Act, pending the next Presidential elections.⁸

Thus NSBA spokesperson Marc Egan's diagnosis seems to be on the mark: "There's no firm resolution legally coming down the pike anytime soon." In the meantime, while we await the Sixth Circuit's discretionary determination as to whether to reconsider the panel's decision, a few other quick clarifications warrant mention.

First, the panel's decision did not validate the plaintiffs' primary claim; rather, the majority based its decision on the perceived ambiguities in the unfunded-mandate provision. Although this provision is obscured by its legal gobbledygook, the clear-notice requirement would appear to apply to the Act as a whole, not to this one provision in isolation. In any event, one option for resolution would be for Congress to either clarify or eliminate this provision.

Second, the inevitable question of whether IDEA is similarly vulnerable because of its far-from-full funding is easily answerable; unlike NCLB and some other statutes originating in 1994-95,⁹ IDEA does not contain the unfunded-mandate language.¹⁰ Finally, it is not at all clear what the majority meant by its dictum that NCLB provides clear notice that participating states and schools districts must fulfill the Act's various educational and accountability requirements. In any event, if anything is clear, this new decision is not the end of a nationally significant story.

1. *Sch. Dist. of City of Pontiac v. Sec'y of the U.S. Dep't of Educ.*, 512 F.3d 252 (6th Cir. 2008). Due to their heavy caseload, the federal appellate courts customarily use three-judge panels for their decisions. The Sixth Circuit covers Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Tennessee.

2. Mark Walsh, "Spellings Asks 6th Circuit to Reconsider NCLB Ruling," *Education Week*, 13 February 2008, p. 26.

3. Mark Walsh, "Court Ruling in NCLB Suit Fuels Fight Over Costs," *Education Week*, 16 January 2008, pp. 1, 19.

4. David Hoff and Mark Walsh, "Sparring on NCLB Legal Ruling Continues," *Education Week*, 30 January 2008, p. 19.

5. See, for example, *Connecticut v. Spellings*, 453 F. Supp. 2d 459 (D. Conn. 2006) (dismissed pre-enforcement challenge for lack of subject-matter jurisdiction); *Alliance for Children, Inc. v. City of Detroit Pub. Sch.*, 475 F. Supp. 2d 655 (E.D. Mich. 2007); *Fresh Start Acad. v. Toledo Bd. of Educ.*, 363 F. Supp. 2d 910 (N.D. Ohio 2005) (dismissed tutor-

ing provider's suits based on lack of private right of action in NCLB); *Ctr. for Law and Educ. v. U.S. Dep't of Educ.*, 315 F. Supp. 2d 15 (D.D.C. 2004) (rejected, primarily based on lack of standing, NCLB suit by two advocacy groups and parents); *Kefferreis v. United States*, 2003 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 18012 (D. Kan. 2003) (rejected teacher's NCLB suit based on prematurity and sovereign immunity); and *Ass'n of Cmty. Orgs. for Reform Now v. New York City Dep't of Educ.*, 269 F. Supp. 2d 338 (S.D.N.Y. 2003) (rejected parents' right to sue for alleged violations regarding the transfer and tutoring provisions of NCLB).

6. Walsh, "Court Ruling," p. 19.

7. *Bd. of Educ. of Ottawa Twp. High Sch. Dist. No. 140 v. Spellings*, 2008 WL 351452 (7th Cir. 2008). However, in a partial victory echoing the threshold step under the Sixth Circuit's *Pontiac* decision, the Seventh Circuit ruled that the school districts had standing to sue the secretary of education, because NCLB requires them to "pay for more tests than they would administer if left to their own devices."

8. See, for example, David Hoff, "Amid Pessimism on NCLB, Talks Continue: Bush, NEA Get Blamed for Lack of Progress on Reauthorization This Year," *Education Week*, 19 December 2007, p. 18; and Sam Dillon, "For a Key Education Law, Reauthorization Stalls," *New York Times*, 6 November 2007, p. A-19.

9. NCLB carried over this provision from the previous version of Title I.

10. The only corresponding provision is limited to a prohibition against any federal government official or employee mandating or otherwise controlling school curricula. 20 U.S.C. § 1417(b) (2006). ■

STATELINE

(Continued from page 630)

states now do. Careful diagnosis is vitally important, and intervention based on a mistake can be costly.

Intervention. Reading problems that go unaddressed are cumulative, and so are the self-esteem problems associated with poor reading skills. Twenty-three states provide support for students who read below grade level. Arkansas state regulations require point-in-time intervention for students found to be reading below grade level. Just Read, Florida! calls for intensive intervention in reading and requires that it occur early and in an innovative manner. In addition, this law requires local boards to adopt policies to support summer academies where students receive intensive reading intervention or competency-based credit-recovery courses.

Kentucky legislation requires that students scoring poorly on the high school readiness exam, the college readiness exam, or the ACT WorkKeys are to have intervention strategies for accelerated learning incorporated into their learning plans. Rhode Island Law mandates "personal literacy plans" for struggling readers in K-3, and this requirement was extended to grades 4 and 5 in 2004. Since then, higher grades have been phased in, and high school seniors were added in the fall of 2007. By 2011 all students reading below grade level will be required to have a literacy plan, and the progress of each student receiving intervention services will have to be monitored. ■