

Reading Research Report

What Strategies Do 'Best Practice' Schools Use To Meet Their 'Reading' Annual Yearly Progress Goals?

Would They Help You Be Successful at 'Test' Time?

Reading Strategies That May Help You:

Cut the number of black students scoring below standard/minimal from 28.5% to 5.1%. (Madison, Wisconsin)

Raise reading ability 62.5% of a Full Grade level. It takes just 15 minutes/day for as little as 20 weeks. (San Diego County)

Close the racial gap in reading. (Madison, Wisconsin)

Jump from 18% reading at grade level, to 74% reading at proficient or higher. (Chattanooga, Tennessee)

Double the percentage of black students scoring at proficient or better. (Madison, Wisconsin)

Increase reading to grade level in 75% of those tutored. (Cape Girardeau, Missouri)

**Plus: How To Get All The Extra Reading Help You Want
And
Strategies To Help You Reduce School Dropouts.**

April, 2007

Why Is An Engineer and Former Business Owner Researching Effective, Practical Ways to Improve Reading Skills?

What is he Selling? That's what I would be asking and no doubt you are too. The short answer: A free resource to help children become good readers.

As the oldest (I prefer first-born) of six children born to parents with an 8th grade education, 'reading' was the ticket that helped me move out of a poverty-level existence.

After learning that 30% to 40% of children nationwide are struggling readers, I started a local chapter of Rolling Readers USA. Rolling Readers USA is a non-profit organization with a mission of helping children become good readers.

Currently, as Rolling Readers-Cape Area, we serve as a **free resource** for any organization that works with children and families. We train parents, tutors, and children (age 10 plus) in reading strategies that good readers use. We will also train the organization's Presenters.

Our approach, based on reading research, is effective. Using our tutoring format with a child for just 15 minutes a day, 4 times a week, has been shown to improve reading skills by a median of 62.5 % of a full grade level in as little as 20 weeks.

Since my background is not in Education (BS in Civil Engineering-University of Missouri-Rolla and MA (Business)-University of Illinois-Springfield), I thought it would be helpful to find out what 'Best Practice' schools and education experts identify as effective reading interventions.

You may wish to see what I found. Reading time: about 11 minutes.

Sincerely,

Gaylon Smith

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What Strategies Do 'Best Practice' Schools Use To Meet Their 'Reading' Annual Yearly Progress Goals?

So. What are the strategies 'Best Practice' schools use to meet their 'Reading' Annual Yearly Progress goals? I looked for:

1. Research-based strategies, for techniques that had demonstrated results, and for schools that have found success with them.
2. Strategies that could be implemented without blowing the budget. Approaches that would work well with other strategies you are using such as reading coaches, Reading Recovery, after school tutoring, and additional teacher training.
3. Ideas on making a positive impact on the largest number of students. Ideas on getting more bang for the buck. And
4. Results. They had to help meet Annual Yearly Progress goals of 'No Child Left Behind'.

It can be done! Because research shows 90% of children who have difficulty reading in the early grades can become readers.

The sources consulted used the 'superstar solution'.

The Superstar Solution.

What can Superstars Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan teach us about Reading? What are their secrets? We found their 3-point secret.

First of all, they needed good solid instruction in the basics.

Second, they needed an understanding of the key strategies. Strategies that top-notch players use.

Third, lots and lots of practice using the basics they were taught and the key strategies of their game.

Reliance on just one or two legs of this three-legged stool would not have provided optimum results. Just because I have had the basic instruction in **how** to play golf doesn't mean I can actually **play** the game!

Superstar Solution to Reading

Dr. Jim Trelease said that reading is a skill that is learned over time. Reading, similar to sports, requires complex skills. Skills that require practice based on good reading instruction while using effective reading strategies.

The schools highlighted here start with well-trained classroom teachers to provide the all-important basic foundation.

They then bring in additional support for the other critical legs of the three-legged stool, practice, and the strategies that good readers use.

Reading helpers/tutors in these key areas don't need the intensive training necessary for the basics provided by classroom teachers.

Reading helpers/tutors, from age 10 and up, can be quickly taught how to be effective in tutoring the strategies that good readers use. Because they already know these strategies intuitively, training to follow a structured format with the tutee is simplified.

These tutor/helpers reinforce what has been taught. They are not reading teachers.

A Word of Caution

Should your school do exactly what these 'Best Practice' schools have done to improve reading skills?

Perhaps not! Why? Because each used strategies that may only work for them in their specific community.

The dynamics of your situation, school, and community must be assessed. You may find, however, some variation or combination of the concepts, ideas, and strategies that would be effective for you.

Let's take a look.

Effective 'Best Practice' Strategies

Madison (Wisconsin) Metropolitan School District

How did MMSD cut the number of black students scoring below standard/minimal from 28.5% to 5.1 % ?

How did they close the racial gap in reading?

How did they double the percentage of black students scoring at proficient or better?

The short answer is tutoring. Volunteer tutoring. Over 1000 tutors, building on the foundation of excellent instruction by teachers in the classroom.

The volunteer tutors use proven reading strategies to tutor grades K-3 in twenty local elementary schools across the Madison Metropolitan School District.

These strategies encourage the tutee to do the things good readers do. Their format includes preparing the tutee for what the book is about, and pausing or waiting when the tutee stops to think about a word. They prompt the tutee with appropriate questions, probe to check understanding, and give lots of praise.

A team of Americorps Vista's coordinate and match volunteer tutors with children in need of help with reading.

Training for the volunteer tutors is provided through RSVP of Dane County. Past and present teachers, and others, are the trainers.

Publicity and recruitment of volunteers get support from the Wisconsin State Journal and WISC-TV. They originally started the ball rolling with a 1995 Civic Journalism Project that studied issues critical to education.

The resulting Schools of Hope Literacy Project is led by the United Way of Dane County, RSVP of Dane County, and the Madison Metropolitan School District.

Find more information: www.mmsd.org/soh

San Diego County Schools

How did San Diego County schools raise reading ability 62.5% of a full Grade Level tutoring each child just 15 minutes each day?

Each 15-minute session followed the Rolling Readers USA structured 'reading strategy' tutoring program.

Median book level increase at the end of 81-120 sessions during the school year was 2.5. Each grade had 4 book levels. Increased ability: 62.5% of a full grade level.

The 1998 study looked at a random sample of 673 students. Book levels were determined by Scholastic, Inc. Rolling Readers USA recruited and trained the volunteers. The schools provided the coordination of the volunteers.

The Rolling Readers USA (a non-profit literacy organization) tutoring program was jointly developed with the Poway Unified School District in San Diego County.

The program is based on research about what good readers do as they are learning to read, and as they are reading.

Good readers integrate 3 cueing systems while reading. Meaning-Structure-Phonics. Does it make sense? Does it sound right? Does it look right?

The tutoring program makes these cueing systems an integral part of a structured 5-step tutoring format. Prepare-Pause-Prompt-Probe-Praise.

Since 1998, San Diego County calls the program 'Everyone A Reader'. It is used in their 23 school districts and 165 elementary schools.

Note 1: The Madison, WI Schools of Hope Literacy Project appears to use a similar tutoring format.

Note 2: Rolling Readers-Cape Girardeau Area continues the Rolling Readers USA tutoring concept as a part of the 'Reading Strategy Seminar'.

Chattanooga, Tennessee

How did 9 of the worst elementary schools in the State of Tennessee bring their 3rd graders up from 18% reading at or above grade level (2000) to 74% reading at proficient or better by 2006? And nearly all were poor.

As reported in Parade, everyone got involved. Chattanooga's local Public Education Foundation, parents, teachers, business leaders, and local residents.

Teachers and principals went through rigorous retraining. The mayor's office established a bonus program for high-performing teachers. The local university offered a special free master's program just for teachers in the failing schools.

The Urban League started an after school literacy program, and community volunteers partnered with parents to help them read to their kids at home.

Long Beach, California

How did Long Beach (with the country's 3rd highest youth poverty rate) develop an elementary school good enough to be named a California Distinguished School?

Stevenson-YMCA Community School, according to Parade, developed a 9-year special partnership with the YMCA.

The **Y** operates inside the school, running an after-school program in conjunction with the teachers. They help link the school with the community.

About 200 parents and community residents are involved in the classroom.

The **Y** partnership trains parents in literacy skills, then sends them out to teach other parents at home. The school also offers parents computer and English classes, and teaches conflict resolution.

Cape Girardeau, Missouri

How did Blanchard Elementary School increase reading to grade level in 75% of those tutored? (Southeast Missourian, Fall 2001).

Blanchard offers many 'extras' to foster better readers. During the 2000-2001 school year, Caring Communities, the local Rolling Readers Chapter, and Blanchard Reading Specialist Carol Brice initiated a new tutoring program.

Volunteer tutors were recruited by Kay Azuma, Caring Communities, and by school staff. Tutors were trained using Rolling Readers tutoring program materials on how to effectively assist struggling readers.

Students were tutored 15 minutes each day for 4 days a week. At the end of the school year, 75 % (6 of 8) were reading at grade level with all having reading improvement.

Training materials were similar to those used by Madison (MMSD) and San Diego County schools.

Additional volunteers were recruited for the following year. Unfortunately, state funding for the Caring Communities support, including volunteer recruitment, training, and coordination, was cut due to state budget issues. The program was discontinued.

National

Do your Middle and High School students understand what they read?

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, almost 70% of 8th graders and 2/3 of 12th graders read below the proficient level. They simply cannot make sense of their textbooks.

At J.E.B. Stuart High School in Falls Church, VA, (where President Bush (2005) announced his \$1.5 billion plan to raise high-school standards and performance), 76% of students were reading below grade level 9 years ago. By 2005, only a handful was behind by 11th grade.

Principal Riddile puts even honors 9th graders through reading instruction in the computer lab. He gives every struggling student 95 minutes every day of either reading or English.

At many schools, including Stuart, faculty teach reading strategies appropriate to their disciplines.

Teachers increasingly spend time in class on “pre-reading” strategies. (This is similar to the Madison, WI and Rolling Readers tutoring program ‘prepare’ step).

They examine headings, captions, photos, and graphics for a sense of where the author is going. They demonstrate how good readers constantly question the authors’ intent, backtrack when they are confused, and make connections to prior knowledge.

The teachers find they are covering more content, more successfully, according to Cynthia Greenleaf, co-director of the Strategic Literacy Initiative at WestEd, a San Francisco-based education research group.

Donald Deshler, Director of the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas, agrees with this approach.

He advises parents not to try to be a teacher, but help kids problem-solve by suggesting ‘pre-reading’, surveying the chapter, skimming, reading sub-heads, and looking at questions at the end of each chapter. (McGrath 2005)

Perhaps students at all grade levels could benefit from this type of guidance. Recent research shows that ‘pre-reading’ actually fires-up the brain to receive the information.

Lessons from the ‘Best Practice’ Examples.

Sound intensive classroom reading instruction by dedicated teachers provides the all-important foundation to be a good reader.

Historically, for 60-70% of all students entering the school system, this is sufficient. Their caregivers have previously taught them (by reading to them and by example) many of the reading strategies they need. Most have found the pleasure in reading. They read willingly.

The other 30-40% need extra help. Help to find the joy and pleasure in reading. Help to learn reading strategies that good readers use. Help in getting extra practice reading.

Extra Help Made the Difference.

The 'best practice' examples show the results when extra focused-help is provided. Extra help for the students and extra help for their caregivers so they can support the students.

The community, business leaders, parents, community organizations, Americorps Vista volunteers, and the schools all worked together for success.

The identified tutor training primarily focused on the reading strategies that good readers use. Strategies that were simple to teach, yet effective in application. Reinforcing and building on the foundation built by the classroom teacher.

The showstoppers: the keywords, 'Extra Help'.

Who will volunteer? Who will recruit extra help? Who will train them? Who will coordinate the activities, and who will keep track of individual progress? The list could go on, but you get the idea.

Finding Extra Reading Help.

Finding outside help in sufficient numbers to make the needed impact on reading improvement requires a large coordinated effort and this takes a lot of time.

There is another potential source for all the reading help you want and need.

Research for this report identified what several schools are doing to solve the extra reading help problem.

Peer tutor/helpers/mentors. Before you throw up your hands, read what schools are doing and what researchers say. Not only are they effective in helping tutees to read, but the peer tutors themselves also benefit.

How To Get All the Reading Help You Want.

Study of Best Practices in Schools Across 20 States

On July 14, 2006, The National Center For Educational Accountability released 'Just For The Kids Study of Best Practices Across 20 States'.

High performing schools throughout the country whose students consistently outperform their peers in similar schools were studied.

Successful intervention strategies these schools used included **reading for 2 hours/day; tutoring; parent involvement; Saturday school; Summer school; year-round school; and after-school tutoring.**

The surprising intervention that also worked well: peer tutoring.

In New York, responsible students with particular strengths give up study hall time to tutor their peers. In Louisiana, high school students serve as tutors.

In Oklahoma, a top performing PK-5 school with 282 students, all (100%) low-income, was highlighted. Demographics included 9.6% black, 18.8% Hispanic, 15.2% Native American, 0.4% Asian, and 56% white. 17.4% were English Language Learners.

Peer tutoring is an important intervention strategy at the school. Students in a grade level can tutor struggling students in the grade below.

And it is working, according to school staff.

What Others Say About Peer Tutoring.

The good news is that students can be explicitly taught to deliver effective tutoring to younger peers. (Garcia, 2004)

Peer tutoring (solves) the nagging problem of delivering effective reading support to the many struggling young readers. (Wright, 2004)

School Psychologist Jim Wright says that "*..Young children tend to find the opportunity to read aloud to an older peer tutor to be quite*

reinforcing, adding a motivational component to this intervention (peer tutoring)”.

The National Reading Panel’s review of effective techniques for training students to read concluded that *“...classroom practices that encourage repeated oral reading with feed back and guidance leads to meaningful improvements in reading expertise for students--for good readers as well as those experiencing difficulties.”* (NRP, 2000 p.3-3)

Peer tutors reinforce what has been taught.

More Examples.

Peer tutoring is being used effectively throughout the nation. How they are used gets modified to fit individual needs and circumstances.

Laingsburg, Michigan’s Elementary School (PK-5, Title I) has an enrollment of 566. They have surpassed AYP standards each year since its inception and 4th and 5th grade MEAP scores all consistently surpass state averages.

According to Maxie Patel, Reading Specialist, Laingsburg High School has developed a ‘for credit’ class of juniors and seniors who train to tutor younger peers. They must have completed their Basic English Language courses to be eligible.

After completion of training, they work with children 4 days a week. Their course also includes learning to raise funds for service projects. The training includes the Rolling Readers tutoring program.

Hayfield Elementary School, Alexandria, VA uses 6th grade tutors for kindergarten students. In addition, their Hayfield Secondary Peer Helpers visit with 25 students in grades 5 and 6 every week. They each spend an hour a week.

Jason Lee Elementary School, Richland, WA, uses 50 students in 4th and 5th grade as peer helpers in a variety of services, including tutoring.

At San Joaquin A+ Schools, Stockton, CA, 6th graders read and discuss popular children’s literature in grades K-3.

Roosevelt Elementary School, San Gabriel, CA, places 5th grade students as tutors with first graders needing reading support. High School and Middle School students provide 4th and 5th graders with one-on-one support in reading and writing.

Peer tutors: an effective, recognized practice

Peer tutoring appears to be an effective, recognized practice. But peer tutors are not reading teachers. They are effective when helping with reading practice and with reading strategies, the things good readers do.

Reading helpers/tutors, apparently from age 10 and up, can be quickly taught how to be effective in tutoring the strategies that good readers use. Because they already know these strategies intuitively, training to follow a structured format with the tutee is simplified.

Peer tutors, because of their ready availability, may be able to help all the struggling readers in your school. They can complement your adult tutors.

Listen.

Properly trained, peer tutors could provide all the reading help you need.

But wait, there's more.

In addition to being effective in helping tutees to read, the peer tutor/helpers themselves also benefit.

One of the many benefits to peer tutoring: **the peer tutor is unlikely to drop out of school**. So a peer tutor program can help with other school goals.

Here is how.

Strategies to Reduce School Dropouts.

Everyone recognizes the need to cut school dropouts down to size.

Melinda Gates, speaking to the United Way of King County on June 7, 2006, addressed both her and Bill Gates concern about education and the number of students who fall by the wayside.

"Here in America, we believe the most destructive inequity is in education. Of every 100 students in ninth grade in America today, only 70 will graduate from high school. Only 40 will go directly to college. Only 30 will be prepared for college. That doesn't meet any American's understanding of equality, and we are working to change it."

Why do students drop out?

There are many reasons but 'within school' factors contribute most to student dropout, according to Will Jordan and James McPartland of Johns Hopkins University in their 1994 study.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation asked school dropouts "Why?"

Reasons included 69% who were not motivated, 47% were bored, and 81% wanted more 'real world' learning opportunities.

Susan Black (in the American School Board Journal) found students who are socially isolated leave school. They stay in school when they perceive their interactions with teachers and administrators as positive. Often one-on-one attention is required to accomplish this.

This theme echoes through research and articles in publications of the National Association of School Psychologists, American School Board Journal, and the National Education Association.

What should be done?

Schools are trying a variety of approaches. Decatur, Georgia schools are hiring coaches for one-on-one intervention. Coaches will assist in any roadblock the student encounters. This effort is expected to cost **\$\$**millions, according to FOXNEWS-TV on September 15, 2006.

Peer tutoring: a solution to school dropouts?

Research has shown that when students tutor or help other students, they benefit in many ways. The tutors learn more, teachers and administrators begin to view them differently, the tutees look up to the tutors, and both tutor and tutee are motivated to do better.

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) is using these peer tutor benefits as a way to combat school dropouts.

The IDRA Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program is an internationally recognized cross-age tutoring program in schools across the United States and Brazil.

In the program, secondary school students who are considered at risk of dropping out of school are placed as tutors of elementary school students during one class each day.

The older students make a difference in the younger students' lives. With a growing sense of responsibility and pride, the students stay and do better in school.

As Juanita Garcia reported in her article in IDRA Newsletter (April 2004):

"...Not only does peer tutoring provide effective reading support, but the tutors also benefit academically from the time spent reviewing and practicing material with their tutees."

"...As their tutees improve, tutor's concept of self improves. Making a meaningful contribution is a powerful experience. Valued Youth tutors stop skipping classes and behaving disruptively after they realize they are role models and are making a difference for their tutees (Supik, 1991)."

Others Agree.

Peer tutoring programs can improve the reading skills of tutors, as well as tutees. (Ehly, 1986).

Peer tutoring programs, in some instances, have been shown to build tutors social skills. (Garcia-Vazquez & Ehly, 1995)

"Our sixth grade tutors benefit from the leadership and responsibility they are given." (Margaret Wergley-Hayfield Elementary School, Alexandria, VA)

Peer Tutoring Builds 14 Developmental Assets.

Many schools and organizations are committed to the principles of THRIVE. The program has identified 40 Developmental Assets that 'Help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.'

Peer tutoring will help build 14 of these Developmental Assets:

7. Community Values Youth.
8. Youth as Resource. *(A useful role.)*
9. Service to Others. *(One hour/week.)*
15. Positive Peer Influence. *(Provides to tutee.)*
16. High Expectations. *(Adults expect they will do well.)*

21. Achievement Motivation. *(Both tutor and tutee are motivated.)*
22. School Engagement. *(Tutoring encourages additional learning.)*
25. Reading for Pleasure. *(Tutoring helps find the joy in reading.)*
26. Caring. *(Tutor helping others.)*
30. Responsibility. *(Tutoring encourages personal responsibility.)*

32. Planning and Decision Making. *(Tutoring requires this.)*
33. Interpersonal Competence. *(Tutors learn empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.)*
38. Self-esteem. *(Tutoring builds self-esteem.)*
39. Sense of Purpose. *(Tutoring can help provide.)*

So the question is, will the benefits of peer tutoring positively impact potential dropouts: the 69% who are not motivated, the bored 47%, and the many students who feel socially isolated?

If so, expect the number of school dropouts to drop significantly.

Time to Take Action?

Perhaps the successful intervention strategies of the schools in this reading research report have provided a catalyst for new, additional, ideas you can put to use in your school district.

Ideas that will help you:

- Achieve your AYP goals in reading.
- Close the diversity reading gap.
- Double the number of black students scoring proficient or higher.
- Radically cut the number of students reading below grade level.

Ideas you can use to:

- Find extra help for reading improvement.
- Cut school dropout rates.
- Deal with fewer troublemakers.
- Build 14 of THRIVE's Developmental Assets.

Ideas that will:

- Send more students to college.
- Further improve your School's reputation in the community.
- Stop the vicious cycle of dropouts and marginal graduates whose children may become the next wave of 'unprepared' students.

The Rolling Readers-Cape Area 'Reading Strategy' Program

Like San Diego County, spend just 16 minutes/day with a struggling reader. Expect to improve reading ability 62.5% of a full grade level in as little as 20 weeks.

We don't teach How to read, we teach how to read Better.

The program is research-based, and so easy a 4th grader can learn it.

More tutor/helpers mean more struggling readers quickly become Proficient readers. 'Test' scores go up.

Handbook for tutor/helpers, Trainer's Script, and on-site training help (if desired) will be provided.

Gaylon Smith

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