

## Best Practices in Teaching READING

- **Increase collaboration and communication within and across grades** to improve articulation. Program consistency, clarity of curriculum expectations for achievement, and widespread responsibility for and commitment to student success are essential.
- Align curriculum content maps **with State Frameworks, Terra Nova objectives**, and other initiatives that identify **challenging, attainable, and high expectations** for *all* students' performance (for advanced, proficient, and partially proficient students), and that incorporate important **higher level thinking skills** (learning to learn skills, self-regulated or self-directed learning, Habits of Mind).
- **Identify currently used or available instructional materials** (basic and supplemental), **events, and technology**--on curriculum content maps. Also identify needed materials and technology.
- **Increase teacher use of varied task structures** (direct instruction or whole group activities, small groups or partner activities, learning centers, independent practice or projects, etc.), differentiated instruction, and appropriate adaptations and accommodations to ensure that instruction is at the appropriate level of challenge.
- **Improve learning opportunities for students to address performance levels 4 & 5** by using such strategies as: teaching thinking skills; practice using reasoning or higher level thinking ("minds on"); "hands on" using manipulatives, experiments, learning centers, etc.; multiple intelligences to help students assess, strengthen, and use to learn more productively; activators of prior knowledge (to preassess student knowledge or level of understanding); graphic organizers to help students organize their knowledge and process their learning; cooperative learning, peer tutoring, or peer mediated instruction; project based activities.
- **Increase student active engagement**, discussing and interacting with other people (adults, peers) and technology in stimulating, interesting activities (rather than ditto worksheets). Increase teacher use of instructional strategies that require students to summarize, evaluate, and share what they are learning; that help students memorize important content (mnemonics, pegboards, etc.); that provide ample opportunities for students to apply skills in a variety of conditions or situations so that successful transfer is attained.
- **Maintain collaborative model of regular teachers working with Title I, reading resource, and special education teachers (either in class model-side-by-side or pull out)**. Schedule and/or assign instructional assistants to students of greatest need. Use these positions flexibly within and across grade levels.
- **Increase emphasis on early reading literacy**. Increase preventive actions (early diagnosis; connections with parents; preschool literacy activities) and small group interventions for beginning and emergent readers (K-3).
- **Develop a system for systematic evaluation of student progress**--assess regularly, share assessment data, make instructional decisions based on assessment data (e.g., student portfolios, skills checklists, words correct per minute, informal reading inventories). [Assessment should be identified on curriculum maps]
- **Preassess individual student strengths and weaknesses and provide appropriate remediation for target areas of weakness**. Use individual reading inventories, skills checklists, previous work samples, Terra Nova results as diagnostic information. Create student profiles to be used to guide current instruction.

- **Provide additional opportunities for students with identified reading disabilities** including meaningful reading and writing opportunities, one-on-one or small group instruction (focusing on comprehension and word recognition), language experience activities, and enrichment activities.
- **Increase teacher use of a range of assessment strategies**--including tests, quizzes, or checks of knowledge, informal monitoring and questioning, teacher assessments, student self-assessments, project or authentic, meaningful use tasks. Use **rubrics** or quality criteria to increase students' awareness of performance expectations.
- **Provide students with adequate instruction and practice in formats similar to those with which they will be assessed** and help students develop **test-taking skills**. Periodically require students to respond to "standardized test-like" formats, questions, and time limits. Increase evaluation that focuses on **holistic, higher-order thinking processes** especially application of knowledge rather than on low-level subskills (as is consistent with Terra Nova).
- **Increase the amount of instructional time allocated to reading instruction.** Given the "right" instructional conditions, more time can mean significant gains. Integrate reading into all content areas. Increase amount of time spent reading aloud to students. Increase amount of time allocated for independent reading (target 28 minutes/day) [least effective=19 minutes].
- Encourage use of **Accelerated Reader** or similar programs as a supplement to instruction.
- **Increase the amount of time spent in small group direct instruction in reading** (target 60 minutes/day)[least effective=38 minutes] Decrease exclusive stress on whole class or reading group activities. Avoid round-robin oral reading using peer reading instead. Increase grouping of students by interests or book choices rather than grouping by reading level.
- **Increase the degree of on task behavior and motivation to learn.** Allow students to read about topics that are of interest to them.
- **Establish and maintain a balanced instructional approach to teaching reading-- comprehension** as well as **reading subskills** such as phonics, word analysis, syllabication. Most teachers teach phonics in isolation, but coaching as students attempt to use these strategies to figure out words is critical. Teach skills in the context of whole and meaningful literature.
  - \*Research recommends using a combination of approaches (phonics, structural analysis, whole language) to develop students' initial abilities in reading.
- **Make vocabulary building an integral part** of the reading program. Word banks, games, charts, songs, rhymes, maps, word walls, etc. create an interest in adding new words. Dolch words, for example, are important ones for students to acquire, but also allow students freedom to add their own words.
- **Increase social, collaborative activities** with much discussion and interaction. **Reduce solitary seatwork.** Follow silent reading with discussion.
- **Develop consistency in teaching reading as a process.** Increase the use of strategies that activate prior

knowledge, help students make and test predictions, structure help during reading, and provide after-reading applications. Increase the level of cognitive engagement in reading activities by including **higher level thinking opportunities**.

- **Provide adequate opportunities for student to write** (e.g., writing before and after reading), Allow invented spelling in children's early writings.
- **Increase children's choice of their own materials** rather than teacher selection of all reading materials for individual and group.
- **Increase children's exposure to a wide and rich range of literature** rather than relying on selections in the basal reader. Create language-rich environment.
- **Model enjoyment of reading** by communicating and discussing own reading tastes, habits, and reading processes. Read orally to the students and discuss. Incorporate an SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) time daily.
- **Improve appropriateness and effectiveness of homework.** Develop and implement effective homework policies related to reading. Promoting enjoyment of reading and increased exposure to reading materials are the goals.
- **Evaluate the success of reading program** by students' reading habits, attitudes, and comprehension rather than only by test scores. Ask for student feedback on a regular basis.
- Provide ongoing, **high quality professional development** to increase teacher competence--visits to innovative programs, district-sponsored graduate level courses, workshops, conferences, reading research, etc. Focus on collaborative understanding of problems and setting goals to overcome.
- Consider **identifying teachers with instructional expertise in reading** to provide assistance, mentoring, and support to other teachers. Additional support may be found at near by colleges or through Regional Educational labs.
- **Provide opportunities for parents** to become involved--focus groups, surveys, active site councils. Increase communication with parents--calls home, notes to parents, classroom news, etc. Disseminate information about ways parents can reinforce reading and writing in the home.

#### **References:**

- Taylor, B.M., Pearson, P.D., Clark, K., & Walpole, S. (1999). *Beating the odds in teaching all children to read: Lessons for effective schools and exemplary teachers*. Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) at website [www.ciera.org](http://www.ciera.org)
- Graves, M.F., Watts, S., & Graves, B. (1994). *Essentials of classroom teaching: Elementary reading*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.