8 Things Policymakers Need to Know about Third Grade Literacy

1. It's Essential for our Future
2. We Know How to Succeed
3. Starting Early Matters
4. Teaching is Fundamental
5. The Sooner the Response, the Better the Result
6. It Involves the Whole Child
7. Families and Communities Must be Partners
8. It's Not Too Late, if We Start Now

When Third Grade Literacy Becomes a State Policy Issue:
Opportunities for Child Advocates to Influence, Leverage and Impact Using the 8 Talking Points and Resource Materials

Over the last decade, there has been increasing state policy attention to the importance of students reading proficiently by the end of third grade. In some instances, state debates have focused on what to do (retention or social advancement) when children are not reading by the end of third grade. These talking points and resource materials are designed to enable child advocates to build on their own assets (evidence-based focus, commitment to child outcomes and closing gaps in results, role as convener and collaborator, and credibility as non-self-interested advocate) to ensure the discussion focus broadly on the policies needed to assure that all children are reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

They provide eight messages, within an overall narrative framework, for child advocates to use in educating policy makers and the public.

1. **IT’S ESSENTIAL FOR OUR FUTURE.** Third grade reading proficiency is essential and achievable for all students and for society.
2. **WE KNOW HOW TO SUCCEED.** There is no one, magic bullet to achieving third literacy, but there are strong, evidence-based strategies involving families, schools and communities to achieve this end.
3. **STARTING EARLY MATTERS.** The first five years are critical to success.
4. **TEACHING IS FUNDAMENTAL.** High-quality reading instruction in the early-elementary classroom is fundamental to reading proficiency.
5. **IT INVOLVES THE WHOLE CHILD.** The common core standards set the bar for what constitutes reading proficiency, but reaching that bar requires a comprehensive approach, providing high-quality language and literacy development throughout the school day.
7. **FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES MUST BE PARTNERS.** Families and communities also play key roles in third grade literacy, particularly involving the time when students are out of school.
8. **IT’S NOT TOO LATE, IF WE START NOW.** Even when children are not reading by the end of third grade, most can still become successful students.

For each message, this document provides: (1) a longer paragraph explaining the statement, and (2) a two- to three-page fact sheet describing and synthesizing the research and evidence in the field, with some key references and resources. This is the first part of an overall toolkit for child advocates. The second part will include additional information on state legislation and policy and more descriptions of exemplary programs and practices to achieve third grade literacy for all children.
Eight Things Policymakers Need to Know About Third Grade Literacy:
Eight Elevator Speeches/Talking Points

1. **IT’S ESSENTIAL FOR OUR FUTURE.** Reading by the end of third grade is essential and achievable. By the end of third grade, absent very special circumstances, all children can read proficiently. This is critical, as education beyond third grade—across virtually all subject areas—depends on reading proficiency. Currently, far too many American children reach the end of third grade without even basic literacy skills, which jeopardizes their future educational success and our nation’s ability to produce a workforce that can lead in a world economy.

2. **WE KNOW HOW TO SUCCEED.** There is not a magic bullet to achieving third grade literacy, but there are strong, evidence-based strategies to get us there. They must involve families, schools and communities. Not only have educators, advocates and policymakers recognized the need to improve reading proficiency by the end of third grade, they have also established the knowledge and practice base to do so. Putting this knowledge into widespread practice—making exemplary practices into mainstream practices—is the challenge policy makers face.

3. **STARTING EARLY MATTERS.** The first five years of life are critical to success. Language and literacy development begin at birth. Today, half of all school failures can be traced back to early childhood and the disparities that children experience even before they enter kindergarten. High-quality early-childhood programs can improve school readiness and subsequent school success. However, even the most effective preschool programs will only mitigate some of the disparities. The first two years of life set the scaffolding for future learning. Intervening with the youngest children requires strengthening families so they can be their child’s first teacher.

4. **TEACHING IS FUNDAMENTAL.** High-quality instruction in the early grades is essential. Decades of research have identified evidence-based strategies that help students achieve reading proficiency. However, simply using evidence-based curriculum is not enough. Teachers and instructors must develop the skills, knowledge and techniques to effectively implement the evidence-based strategies and curriculum. In fact, a student’s teacher has the largest impact on the student’s development of literacy and comprehension skills.

5. **IT INVOLVES THE WHOLE CHILD.** A comprehensive approach—high-quality language and literacy development throughout the school day—is critical to achieving reading proficiency. The common core standards establish the content that students need to master in language and the arts, but they do not provide the tools or strategies to reach them. Literacy and reading comprehension are based on overall language development and comprehension of relationships and concepts, which need to occur in all areas of instruction. Reading research shows most students develop code-based reading skills, but are much less likely to develop comprehension skills. High-quality teaching engages students and helps them build language and literacy skills throughout the day. It is also important to
establish a learning environment that accounts for different learning styles, and not simply “teaching to the test.”

6. **THE SOONER THE RESPONSE, THE BETTER THE RESULT.** There are many different reasons children struggle in school, but most are best addressed by early identification and an individualized response. These reasons can be non-cognitive (health, social and emotional development, etc.) as well as cognitive, and require responses that build on students’ specific learning styles. There are also major disparities in reading proficiency in English among dual language learners and their peers, but these can be eliminated by high-quality instruction that is culturally and linguistically responsive.

7. **FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES MUST BE PARTNERS.** School-parent-community partnerships play an important role in children’s educational development. For example, parent-school teams can identify and respond to excessive absenteeism; summer programs and activities can stimulate students and address learning loss; and after-school and weekend programs can provide guidance and learning during out-of-school times. These strategies also include paying attention to child health and development issues, which are foundational to children’s learning.

8. **IT’S NOT TOO LATE, IF WE START NOW.** Even among children not reading by the end of third grade, most can still become successful students. This, however, requires additional and concerted, corrective action. Most children who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade will not fare well in future educational experiences without significant changes in their learning environments. The research behind the effectiveness of social advancement and retention is mixed. Whether or not students are retained or advanced, it likely will require doing more, and doing it differently, in order to engage them so they can catch up with their peers and progress educationally.
Reading by the end of third grade is essential for our future.

By the end of third grade, absent very special circumstances, all children can read proficiently. This is critical, as education beyond third grade—across virtually all subject areas—depends on reading proficiency. Currently, far too many American children reach the end of third grade without even basic literacy skills, which jeopardizes their future educational success and our nation’s ability to produce a workforce that can lead in a world economy.

What the Research Shows...

- Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is a sentinel indicator of early education, health and social success. It is also a strong predictor of future academic success.
- Major disparities in reading proficiency exist by socioeconomic status and race.
- Far too many children are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade.
- The United States is no longer the educational leader it traditionally has been. This threatens the country’s future ability to lead in an increasingly educated world economy.

Trend in Fourth Grade NAEP Reading Scores

- We have reached a plateau in 4th grade reading achievement. Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scores have remained unchanged since 2007 and have only improved by 3 points over the last decade.


According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 67 percent of fourth graders read below the proficient level. The proportion of fourth graders reading below the proficient level is even higher among Hispanic and African-American children and children from low-income families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Below Proficient</th>
<th>Below Basic</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Low-Income</td>
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<td>All Students</td>
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A study conducted by Harvard University’s Program on Education Policy and Governance found that nearly a dozen countries—from Germany and Brazil to Lithuania and Columbia—are making academic gains 2 to 3 times faster than American students. The gains made by these countries equate to approximately two years of learning.

A joint report by the Center for the Next Generation and the Center for American Progress details the progress China and India are making in expanding their labor forces to play a bigger role in the global economy and the urgent implications of these policies for U.S. competitiveness. By 2030, China will have 200 million college graduates—more than the entire U.S. workforce. China has also identified, and is working towards accomplishing, several ambitious national goals—from ensuring that no child drops out of school for financial reasons to doubling enrollment in higher education. By 2020, India will be graduating four times as many college graduates as the United States.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students’ reading, mathematics, and science literacy. The 2009 PISA scores show that the U.S. falls outside the top 25 percent of OECD reading scores, performing below countries like Estonia, Canada and Japan. Several countries experienced significant gains in reading performance from 2000 to 2009. For example, Peru, Chile and Albania improved their reading performance by over 25 points. Unfortunately, in that period, reading performance in the United States fell by 5 points.

A more detailed evaluation of PISA scores and trends in performance can be found:


http://dx.doi.org/10.1787.9789264091580-en
We Know How to Succeed

There is not a magic bullet to achieving third grade literacy, but there are strong, evidence-based strategies to get us there. They must involve families, schools and communities. Not only have educators, advocates and policymakers recognized the need to improve reading proficiency by the end of third grade, they have also established the knowledge and practice base to do so. Putting this knowledge into widespread practice—making exemplary practices into mainstream practices—is the challenge policy makers face.

What the Research Shows...

- There is a wealth of exemplary programs that have produced major gains in child development across the birth-to-eight span—across the domains of health, family support, early learning and early response to special needs.
- To achieve success on a population level, these exemplary programs need to be made into mainstream practice through a systemic focus that increases the skills and response from systems as a whole.
- The diffusion of innovation and the systems building literature offer effective strategies for such diffusion.
- State examples show that a comprehensive focus can make major gains in third grade literacy.

- Numerous exemplary programs have produced major development across the birth-to-eight cohort. These programs (comprehensive health care, home visiting and family support, early-learning and comprehensive in-school programs) need to become mainstream practice. For example, the Strengthening Families Framework is an exemplary model that helps early-education programs work with parents to build the following protective factors: parental resilience, social connections and concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social emotional competence of children. There is a need for a comprehensive diffusion of exemplary programs, like Strengthening Families, into mainstream practice. This diffusion must occur through a systematic process that increases the skills of and response from the system as a whole.

- Between 2002 and 2011, three states (Alabama, Florida and Maryland) made substantial gains in reading proficiency, as measured by 4th grade NAEP reading scores. These gains are particularly impressive because improvements have been across the board and include all demographics. Each of these states implemented concerted and comprehensive reforms to improve 3rd grade reading. The lessons and practices from these exemplary states need to be diffused across the country.
There are several theories surrounding the process of transforming practices from exemplary to mainstream. One of the most widely recognized theories is Rogers’ Diffusion of Innovations. This theory examines the process by which a new idea or practice is communicated through certain channels, over time, among the members of a social system. These four elements (the innovation itself, communication channels, time and the social system) influence the spread of a new idea.

An innovation’s diffusion is also impacted by five of its characteristics: 1. Relative advantage, 2. Compatibility, 3. Complexity vs. simplicity, 4. Trialability, and 5. Observability.

Rogers also identified the Five Stages of the Diffusion Process:

- Knowledge
- Persuasion
- Decision
- Implementation
- Confirmation

Finally, Rogers describes the process of adoption as a normal, bell-shaped distribution with 5 adopter categories—innovators, early adopters, late majority adopters, and laggards. The identification of such adopter categories provides a basis for designing and implementing intervention strategies aimed at particular groups of individuals.


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**Case Study: Florida**

In 2002, the Florida legislature mandated that 3rd grade students scoring below level 2 (of 5 performance levels) on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test in reading to be retained and provided with intense remediation unless they qualify for one of six ‘good cause exemptions’...The Florida policy also includes provisions intended to ensure that retained students acquire the reading skills needed to be promoted the following year. For example, retained students must be given the opportunity to participate in their district’s summer reading program. Schools must also develop an academic improvement plan for each retained student and assign them to a ‘high-performing teacher’ in the retention year. Finally, retained students must receive intensive reading instruction.

[http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/education_seminar_series/GradeRetention_061812.pdf](http://www.newyorkfed.org/research/education_seminar_series/GradeRetention_061812.pdf)
Michael Fullan has also done extensive work on strategies to disseminate exemplary programs into mainstream practice. “Having a ‘theory in use’ is not good enough, of itself. The people involved must also push to the next level, to make their theory of action explicit, as it relates to the specific assumptions and linkages that connect the strategy of the desired outcomes.”
http://www.michaelfullan.com/media/13396072630.pdf

There is also a need to focus on closing the gap in results experienced by low-income and minority children. Focusing on closing this gap will help to raise all scores. The below resources provide more information on this topic:

- Health Disparities and Gaps in School Readiness, Janet Currie
- Early Childhood Care and Education: Effects on Ethnic and Racial Gaps in School Readiness
Starting Early Matters

The first five years of life are critical to success. Language and literacy development begin at birth. Today, half of all school failures can be traced back to early childhood and the disparities that children experience even before they enter kindergarten. High-quality early-childhood programs can improve school readiness and subsequent school success. However, even the most effective preschool programs will only mitigate some of the disparities. The first two years of life set the scaffolding for future learning. Intervening with the youngest children requires strengthening families so they can be their child’s first teacher.

What the Research Shows...

- High-quality early-education and preschool programs can benefit all children, but in particular can narrow, although not close, the gap experienced by low-income and minority children.
- Strengthening families in support of their children’s development and averting toxic stress and early-childhood adversity is essential, particularly in the first two years of life.
- Child health practitioners need to play key roles as first-responders to child developmental concerns and family stresses—linking children and families to supports that can strengthen protective factors.

- Literacy development begins at birth. Research shows that the majority of the brain’s physical growth occurs during the first two years of life. During this time period, vital neuron connections are made in response to the child’s environment. Stimulation and interactions are essential to the development of these connections and the brain’s hardwiring. Therefore, parents and caregivers play a critical role in building infants’ and young children’s early literacy skills.

- Literacy development begins as infants hear language used around them. Researchers have found that children from middle-income families begin kindergarten with a vocabulary four to six times larger than the vocabulary of children from lower-income families. The successful development of language and literacy during early childhood years is critical to future literacy achievement. In other words, literacy gaps appear well before children step foot in a classroom.

“Research findings suggest that what happens to children early in life has a profound impact on their later achievement. Children who enter school not yet ready to learn continue to have difficulty later in life. They perform less well in elementary and high school than their higher-performing peers and are more likely to become teen parents, engage in criminal activities, and suffer from depression. Ultimately, these children attain less education and are more likely to be unemployed as adults.”

School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps (The Future of Children)
http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/15_01_ExecSummary.pdf

Similarly, racial and ethnic gaps in academic achievement are also present when children start school.

Approximately 50 percent of the test score gap between black and white high school students is evident when children start school.

According to The Future of Children’s Report, School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps, increasing access to high-quality center-based early-childhood education programs for all 3- and 4-year-olds is the most promising strategy to boost academic achievement and close the school readiness gap. These programs should include:

- High-quality learning environment, including include small class sizes, a low teacher-pupil ratio, and teachers with bachelor degrees and training in early-childhood education, and a stimulating, evidence-based curriculum
- Trained teachers who can identify children with moderate to severe behavioral problems and work with these children to improve their social and emotional skills
- Parent training that reinforces what teachers are doing in school to enhance children’s development

Home visits that allow staff to screen for physical and mental-health problems among parents or other behaviors that are not conducive to healthy child development.

Integration—early-childhood education programs should be aligned with kindergarten programs to make the transition to kindergarten as smooth and successful as possible.

Additional information can be found at:

- Comprehensive early-childhood programs that include health, early learning, and family support can improve school readiness and subsequent school success.

The BUILD Initiative helps states build systems to support early childhood development. Their model (pictured, left) illustrates the importance of developing comprehensive early-childhood programs.


- Ensuring comprehensive developmental health in the earliest years is critical to success. There is impressive and growing evidence that comprehensive, preventive and developmental health services that start in the health practitioner’s office contribute to addressing some of the major concerns affecting children’s growth and development, including: learning, education and closing the achievement gap; social and emotional development and adjustment; obesity, diabetes and chronic health conditions. Research-based programs like Help Me Grow (http://www.helpmegrownational.org), Bright Futures (http://brightfutures.aap.org), and Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors (http://www.familiesinschools.org/abriendo-puertas-opening-doors/) have been shown to improve children’s healthy development.

- Providing strong early-learning environments in the preschool years can have a lasting impact on children’s educational trajectories.
  - Research has consistently shown that 3- and 4-year-olds who attend a high-quality preschool succeed at a higher rate in kindergarten and beyond—academically and socially http://www.nieer.org/resources/factsheets/1.pdf.
  - Research demonstrates that early-learning experiences are linked with later school achievement, emotional and social well-being, fewer grade retentions and reduced incidences of juvenile delinquency and that these outcomes are all factors associated with later adult productivity.
    http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/10.pdf
• Strengthening families and averting toxic stress in the earliest years is also essential to the healthy development of children.

**Toxic Stress:**

**What is Toxic Stress?**

• The Center for the Developing Child defines toxic stress as “strong, unrelieved activation of the body’s stress management system in the absence of protective adult support.”

**Why is Toxic Stress Important?**

• Extensive biological research demonstrates that severe chronic stress can become toxic to developing brains and biological systems. In the absence of responsive relationships with adult caregivers, a child’s stress response systems go on high alert and stay there. The cumulative toll increases the likelihood of developmental delays, learning disabilities, behavior problems and many other health conditions (diabetes, heart disease, etc.) Without caring adults to buffer children, the unrelenting stress caused by extreme poverty, neglect, abuse, or severe maternal depression can weaken the architecture of the developing brain, with long-term consequences for learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health.

**What Can We Do about Toxic Stress?**

• Strengthening families in support of their children’s development and averting toxic stress and early-childhood adversity, particularly in the first two years of life, is essential.

Teaching is Fundamental

High-quality instruction in the early grades is essential. Decades of research have identified evidence-based strategies that help students achieve reading proficiency. However, simply using evidence-based curriculum is not enough. Teachers and instructors must develop the skills, knowledge and techniques to effectively implement the evidence-based strategies and curriculum. In fact, a student’s teacher has the largest impact on the student’s development of literacy and comprehension skills.

What the Research Shows...

- There are powerful, evidence-based strategies to teach children how to read (during the classroom time devoted to reading), but many of these strategies and techniques are not in common practice nor are there professional development and coaching systems to transmit these exemplary practices.
- Children are learning throughout the school day, and language and literacy need to be stressed and supported throughout the day, not just in the reading period.
- Skilled and passionate teachers are the key to promoting children’s learning in the classroom.
- Most elementary teachers can improve their skills and be effective instructors, but this requires an

Michael Fullan, an internationally recognized expert in education reform, emphasizes the importance of strengthening all teachers. “The problem is that no nation has gotten better by focusing on individual teachers as the driver... they were successful because they developed the entire teaching profession, raising the bar for all.” Fullan has identified four characteristics of drivers of education reform. Drivers should: foster intrinsic motivation, engage teachers and students in continuous improvement, inspire collective or team work, and affect all students and teachers.

http://www.michaelfullan.com/media/13501655630.pdf
Evidence-Based Strategies that Help Students Achieve Reading Proficiency:

The National Reading Panel report analyzed the full body of K-12 literacy research and identified five “pillars” of good early reading instruction—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension—and three instructional strategies that have demonstrated efficacy in developing literacy skills.


- The Institute for Education Sciences recommends five strategies for improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through third grade:
  - Teach students how to use reading comprehension strategies
  - Teach students to identify and use text’s organization structure to comprehend and remember content
  - Select texts purposefully to support comprehensive development
  - Establish an engaging and motivating context in which to teach reading comprehension
  - Guide students through focused, high-quality discussion on the meaning of text
    http://www.missionliteracy.com/page15/page3/assets/IES%20Reading%20Comp%2020092810%201.pdf

- While the use of evidence-based strategies and curricula is critical to help students achieve reading proficiency, research demonstrates that the teacher, not the curriculum, has the largest impact on students’ comprehension. For example, in 2005, Tivnan and Hemphill examined the reading comprehension of first-graders in a community that implemented an evidence-based literacy curriculum. Even though the curriculum was implemented district-wide, outcomes varied dramatically. Some teachers were able to bring 80 percent of their students to grade level in reading comprehension, whereas other teachers were only able to bring 20 percent of their students to grade level. Tivnan and Hemphill’s findings support the claim that simply utilizing an evidence-based curriculum is not enough—teachers must have, or develop, the necessary skills to properly implement the curriculum.
The important role that teachers play in their students’ literacy development is also supported by a study conducted by Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill (1991). This study examined students whose home environments did not promote reading comprehension. One-hundred percent of students made adequate progress if they had strong comprehension teachers two years in a row. Twenty-five percent made adequate progress if they had a strong reading comprehension teacher for only one year. Zero percent made adequate progress if they had weak reading comprehension teachers both years. A 2003 study conducted by Taylor, Pearson, Peterson, and Rodriguez supported Snow, Barnes, et al.’s work. This study found that 2nd-5th graders showed dramatically different rates of growth in reading comprehension depending on their teacher and his or her practices (not the curriculum used).

Recognizing the important role that teachers play in the development of literacy and comprehension skills, it is critical to provide teachers with effective professional development. Providing effective professional development can help teachers develop the necessary skills to implement evidence-based literacy development strategies and improve teaching practices. The graphic below depicts research-supported characteristics of effective professional development for literacy teachers:

http://www.futurescholars.rutgers.edu/FutureScholars/Images/Raising%20Literacy%20Levels%20with%20Collaborative%20On-Site%20Professional%20Development.pdf

• Duke, Pearson, Strachan, and Billman identified 10 essential elements of effective reading comprehension instruction that research suggests every teacher should engage in to foster and teach reading comprehension:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10 Essential Elements of Effective Reading Comprehension Instruction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build disciplinary and world knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide exposure to a volume and range of texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide motivating texts and contexts for reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach strategies for comprehending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach text structures</td>
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### Additional Resources of Evidence-Based Tools and Instructional Strategies to Promote Literacy Development:

- “Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension” (Duke, N & Pearson, P)
- Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)
  http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals
- Success for All
  http://www.sucessforall.org
- Reading Recovery Program
  http://readingrecovery.org
- Comprehensive Intervention Model
  http://education.gsu.edu/ece/6005.html
It Involves the Whole Child

A comprehensive approach—high-quality language and literacy development throughout the school day—is critical to achieving reading proficiency. The common core standards establish the content that students need to master in language and the arts, but they do not provide the tools or strategies to reach them. Literacy and reading comprehension are based on overall language development and comprehension of relationships and concepts, which need to occur in all areas of instruction. Reading research shows most students develop code-based reading skills, but are much less likely to develop comprehension skills. High-quality teaching engages students and helps them build language and literacy skills throughout the day. It is also important to establish a learning environment that accounts for different learning styles, and not simply “teaching to the test.”

What the Research Shows...

- While certain levels of mastery of reading and mathematics can and should be expected of children by the end of third grade, their paths to getting there involve more than cognitive development. Social and emotional development and approaches to learning are as essential in the early-elementary years as in the preschool years.
- Families and communities remain very important to children’s education and development and schools can support such engagement.
- Children who have health conditions, difficulty seeing or hearing, or dental pain will find it difficult to learn. Ensuring health also is critical to educational success.
- Teaching to the test can adversely affect student enthusiasm and thirst for learning in school. Non-cognitive development is as much a key to success as cognitive development.

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading has recognized the importance of comprehensive literacy instruction and has developed three issue papers that explore the rationale for incorporating literacy development into all subjects (specifically STEM classes). A summary of these papers can be found at http://gradelevelreading.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Read-STEM-summary-01-14-13.pdf. Here are highlights:

- To be academically successful, students must develop literacy skills in all content areas. Each content area utilizes different types of texts, writing styles and language to convey information (MD).
• Integrating literacy development into all content areas (science, math, social studies, etc.) has been shown to improve overall reading achievement. This strategy of integrated learning has been especially effective in underserved and underrepresented populations (GLRC).
• When teachers from all content areas (science, math, social studies, etc.) purposefully align curriculum, instruction and assessment of students, achievement and long-term proficiency improve in all areas.
• As noted earlier, most students develop code-based reading skills, but are much less likely to develop comprehension skills. Adding meaning-based strategies to teachers’ classroom approaches, alongside code-focused programs, is an effective strategy.
• It is important to use both informational and narrative texts in literacy instruction. Contextual literacy programs that incorporate knowledge-building into literacy development have been successful in improving both literacy and content-area knowledge.
• Incorporating literacy development throughout the day requires greater intentionality and investment in teacher preparation programs. This approach requires cooperation from federal, state, and local policymakers and boards of education in creating standards, curriculum and assessments that support this integration.

“Reading and writing do not take place solely in the English/Language Arts classroom. Literacy skills are critical across all content areas and each discipline utilizes specialized texts, writing styles, and language to analyze and communicate ideas and concepts... Students must develop the skills to comprehend complex informational texts, engage in purposeful writing, and communicate effectively within all content areas. These literacy practices will not only deepen students’ content knowledge, but also prepare them for the challenging reading, writing, and research that will be required in college and the workplace.”

Literacy in All Subjects, Maryland Department of Education

Maryland Classroom: Literacy in All Subjects, A publication from the Maryland State Department of Education, April 2012, Vol. 17, No. 2 http://www.msde.state.md.us/mdclassroom/Vol17_No2_042012.pdf

• The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was written to ensure that all children with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate public education to meet their unique needs. Parts B and C of this Act are relevant to the early identification and response to children who are struggling with reading skills.
  o Part B lays out the educational guidelines for school children ages 3-21 and provides financial support for state and local school districts.
  o Part C recognizes the need to identify and reach very young children with disabilities. The primary role of Part C is to provide guidelines concerning the funding and services for children from birth through 2 years of age. Part C facilitates the coordination of federal, state, local, and private services (physical and occupational therapy, social work services, assistive technology devices, etc.). The Early Intervention program, developed under Part C, provides federal funds to assist states in preparing and implementing a system of services for children from birth to age three. Early intervention may remediate existing developmental concerns or prevent their occurrence.
**Case Study: The Early Detection and Intervention of Autism Spectrum Disorders**

- Experts can reliably diagnose autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in children from 12-18 months.
- A growing body of research demonstrates the long-term gains and cost-effectiveness of early identification and treatment of ASD. The earlier autism is detected and the child gains access to quality, behavioral treatment, the better the long-term outcome.
- A “wait and see” approach is not appropriate if autism is suspected. Delaying a diagnosis can mean forfeiting the significant gains that early interventions (before age 6) have been shown to produce. Early interventions have even been shown to prevent the regression of communication and social skills in some cases.
- For example, the Early Start Denver Model (EDSM) is a comprehensive behavioral early intervention program for children with ASD as young as 12 months. This model has been found to reduce the need for ASD therapies and special education services and improve social skills and brain responses to social stimuli. EDSM has been shown to increase IQ, improve adaptive and social behaviors, and promote normal brain development. ESDM has also shown a positive return on investment by the time children that received the intervention enter high school.

For more information on Early Interventions for ASD: [http://apa.org/monitor/2012/10/autism.aspx](http://apa.org/monitor/2012/10/autism.aspx)

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**Early interventions reduce the likelihood of subsequent special education and grade retention**

- The National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study followed over 2,000 children participating in early intervention through Part C of IDEA. The study found that nearly 75 percent of parents reported that they felt that early intervention had “a lot” of influence on their child’s development. The study also found a total average cost savings of $15,740 per child. [http://www.advocacyoncall.org/education/early_intervention](http://www.advocacyoncall.org/education/early_intervention)
- The Chicago Child Parent Center (CPC) is the second oldest federal preschool program and the oldest extended early-intervention program. A 15-year longitudinal study was conducted to investigate the link between program participation and educational attainment by age 20. The study found that participation in an early-childhood intervention by low-income children was associated with better educational and social outcomes by age 20. [http://www.ccfc.ca.gov.pdf/help/chicago_cpc_jama.pdf](http://www.ccfc.ca.gov/pdf/help/chicago_cpc_jama.pdf)
- Studies demonstrate that birth-to-3 interventions can influence special-education referrals and retention. High-quality, intensive early interventions have been shown to reduce the need for placement in special education, reduce dropout and delinquency rates, and decrease the probability of retention. [http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec29/vol50/num04/Preventing-Early-School-Failure%20-%20What-Works%C2%A2.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec29/vol50/num04/Preventing-Early-School-Failure%20-%20What-Works%C2%A2.aspx)
The Sooner the Response, the Better the Result

There are many different reasons children struggle in school, but most are best addressed by early identification and an individualized response. These reasons can be non-cognitive (health, social and emotional development, etc.) as well as cognitive, and require responses that build on students’ specific learning styles. There are also major disparities in reading proficiency in English among dual language learners and their peers, but these can be eliminated by high-quality instruction that is culturally and linguistically responsive.

What the Research Shows...

- Many developmental behavioral concerns can be identified very early, with up to one in five children experiencing some treatable concern by age two or three.
- Early detection and response to developmental delays and behavioral concerns can prevent the need for remedial attention later.
- These can have positive financial as well as developmental impacts, in reduced need for remediation and special education programs, let alone improved educational and social success.
- Early response in school to developmental and behavioral issues is needed to ensure that children do not become struggling readers and are socially and emotionally available for cognitive development.

- The Institute for Education Sciences (IES) developed a practice guide for educators that includes evidence-based recommendations for comprehensive early-detection strategies that identify struggling readers and assist them before they fall behind. IES’ five multi-tiered recommendations include:
  - Screen all students for potential reading problems at the beginning of the year and again in the middle of the year. Regularly monitor the progress of students who are at elevated risk for developing reading disabilities.
  - Provide differentiated reading instruction for all students based on assessments of students’ current reading levels (Tier 1).
  - Provide intensive, systemic instruction on up to three foundational reading skills in small groups to students who score below the benchmark score on universal screening. Typically, these groups meet between three to five times per week for 20-40 minutes (Tier 2).
  - Monitor the progress of Tier 2 students at least once a month. Use the data to determine whether students still require intervention. For those students still making insufficient progress, school-wide teams should design a Tier 3 intervention plan.
  - Provide intensive instruction on a daily basis that promotes the development of the various components of reading proficiency to students who show minimal progress after reasonable time in Tier 2 small group instruction (Tier 3).
The Institute for Education Science’s full report on the importance of early and individualized intervention can be found here: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practice_guides/rti_reading_pg_021809.pdf

English-language learners (ELLs) represent a significant and growing portion of the U.S. student population. The unique learning needs of this population are not currently being met, as evidenced by the significant achievement gap that exists between ELLs and non-ELLs. By first grade, a full one-year reading gap exists between ELL and non-ELL students. By fifth grade, ELLs have fallen two years behind their non-ELL peers. These achievement gaps culminate in far lower graduation rates of ELL students.

- Stand for Children has identified several strategies and successful programs that can help bridge the academic and language gaps experienced by ELL students. Selected strategies are summarized below; the complete report can be found at: http://standleadershipcenter.org/sites/standleadershipcenter.org/files/media/WWSF-ELL_0.pdf
  - There is an ongoing debate regarding the merits of bilingual instruction vs. an English immersion approach. The evidence does not suggest a “one size fits all” solution. Research suggests that quality of instruction—rather than the language of instruction—matters most. Any differences in English reading skills between students schooled in a bilingual-education setting and students in an English-immersion setting disappear by fourth grade.
  - Improve the integration of content-area and English language instruction. Content-area teachers need to better understand the process of first- and second-language acquisition and learn strategies to make academic content more accessible to ELLs and less dependent on their level of English. Similarly, language-instruction teachers must integrate English instruction within the academic context. Balancing academic content and English-language development is difficult, but essential.
  - English-language learners must do more—learn a new language in addition to mastering core academic content—in the same amount of time as their non-ELL peers. As a result, ELL students can benefit from increased learning time (expanded access to preschool, before- and after-school programs, summer school, extended school calendar, etc.). However, simply adding time is likely inadequate. The quality of additional time is critical. The evidence base is strongest for the impact of preschool on ELLs. Research suggests that both English-immersion and bilingual-education preschool programs benefit young ELLs. Increasing preschool participation rates appears to be an excellent starting point.

Success for All is a nationally recognized model that has been shown to improve outcomes and narrow achievement gaps for ELLs through cooperative learning, regular assessments, systematic phonics, regrouping for reading instruction and family engagement. Success for All offers a bilingual program that teaches reading in Spanish in first and second grade before transitioning to English-only instruction in third grade. More information can be found at: http://www.successforall.org/
Families and Communities Must be Partners

School-parent-community partnerships play an important role in children’s educational development. For example, parent-school teams can identify and respond to excessive absenteeism; summer programs and activities can stimulate students and address learning loss; and after-school and weekend programs can provide guidance and learning during out-of-school times. These strategies also include paying attention to child health and development issues, which are foundational to children’s learning.

What the Research Shows...

- Almost all families can be engaged in their children’s education, provided there are multiple ways for them to be engaged and they are supported in doing so.
- Place matters—there must be special attention to ensure school success in high poverty neighborhoods, which often have disproportionately high proportions of students of color who may be marginalized or subject to institutional racism and discrimination.
- Successful schools in high poverty neighborhoods have found ways to reach out and engage family and community leaders in their work and to achieve success.

Chronic absenteeism, summer learning loss, and unsupervised out-of-school time all contribute to educational difficulties.

CFPC, 2013
Addressing Chronic Absenteeism:

- The Problem:
  - American’s education system is based on the assumption that (barring illness or extraordinary event) students are in class every weekday ... students need to attend school daily to succeed
  - Students who are chronically absent are more likely than other students to drop out
  - Chronic absenteeism increases achievement gaps at the elementary, middle and high school levels
- The Solution:
  - School, family and community partnerships can significantly decrease chronic absenteeism
  - Communicating with families about attendance, celebrating good attendance with students and families, and connecting chronically absent students with community mentors have been shown to measurably reduce chronic absenteeism from one year to the next
  - Attendance Works is a national and state initiative that promotes better policy and practice around school attendance. Attendance Works promotes tracking chronic absence for all students and partnering with families and community organizations to intervene when poor attendance is a problem for students or schools.

http://www.attendanceworks.org/

Addressing Summer Learning Loss:

- The Problem:
  - All children who do not engage in educational activities during the summer experience learning loss. However, the rate of learning loss varies significantly by socioeconomic status. While students from high- and low-income households make similar achievement gains during the school year, children from low-income households experience more profound learning loss than their more affluent peers.
- The Solution:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of an Evidence-Based Program, Designed to Prevent and Reduce Summer Learning Loss</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Increase the duration and intensity</em> of the traditional summer school model to six weeks, full days</td>
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<td><em>Expand participation</em> from only those struggling academically to all students in school-wide Title I programs</td>
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<td>Change the focus from narrow remediation and test-preparation to a <em>blended approach of academic learning in core subjects and hands-on activities</em> that foster critical skills like collaboration, innovation and creativity</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Strengthen and expand partnerships</em> with community organizations and public agencies that provide summer activities to align and leverage existing resources, identify and meet gaps in service, improve program quality and develop shared outcomes for summer success</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Provide incentives to students who improve attendance and engagement</em> by making enrichment activities such as art, music, sports and free breakfast and lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Provide innovative professional development</em> for educators and ensure summer programs offer teachers a chance to test new models of teaching and gain valuable leadership experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer programming needs to move from the periphery to the center of school reform strategies through <em>better planning, infrastructure development, data collection, and accountability</em></td>
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</tbody>
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Addressing Unsupervised Out-of-School Time:

- Learning is critically enhanced through family involvement in out-of-school programs. Programs that actively involve families are able to help their kids more because positive family engagement is related to improved academic and developmental youth outcomes, while “programs that operate in isolation – while they may succeed in providing positive activities in a healthy environment – may not attain their goals for youth unless they also reach out to parents ...”

NIOST and Intercultural Center for Research in Education (INCRE), (2006). Massachusetts After-School Research Study (MARS)

Four Effective Strategies to Improve Family Engagement in Out-of-School Time

- Solicit parent feedback for program implementation and improvement
- Establishment of trusting relationships
- Positive communication and creating parental leadership opportunities strengthens the relationship between the program and the community it serves
- Family-friendly staff
- Develop connections across individuals and organizations
- Provide opportunities to build a network of resources—pooling assets and ideas regarding family engagement

Engaging Families in Out-of-School Time Programs Toolkit: Tools to Strengthen After-School and Youth Programs by Increasing Family Involvement

Community Schools: an example of a partnership that seeks to achieve the twin goals of high-quality instruction and community engagement

Community Schools: High-Quality Instruction and Community Engagement

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. A community school serves as a hub that brings multiple partners together to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities. Community schools offer personalized curriculum that emphasize real-world learning and community problem solving. Community schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone in the community.

Community schools build on the strengths of the entire community. Community members utilize their strengths to actively participate in designing, supporting, monitoring and advocating quality programs and activities in the school and community. Engaging the community helps improve the quality of instruction the school provides. Community schools are organized to support learning—children, youth and adults are expected to learn at high standards and become contributing members of their community.

http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/what_is_a_community_school.aspx

Additional Resources:

- The Importance of Being In School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation’s Public Schools (Robert Balfanz and Vaughan Byrnes, May 2012)
  https://getschooled.com/system/assets/assets/152/original/FINALChronicAbsenteeismReport_May16_executives ummary_withcover_20_1_.pdf?1337209810
- Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades (Hedy N. Chang and Marijose Romero, September 2008)
  http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_837.html
- Getting Students to School: Using Family and Community Involvement to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism (Steven B. Sheldon and Joyce L. Epstein)
  http://www.scholar.org/journal/fw04%5CSheldon%20&%20Epstein.pdf
- Summer Learning: Moving from the Periphery to the Core
- IES Practice Guide: Structuring Out-of-School Time to Improve Academic Achievement
- Engaging Families in Out-of-School Time: Tools to Strengthen After School and Youth Programs by Increasing Family Involvement
- Engaging Families in Out-of-School Time: Tools to Strengthen After School and Youth Programs by Increasing Family Involvement
It’s Not Too Late, if We Start Now

Even among children not reading by the end of third grade, most can still become successful students. This, however, requires additional and concerted, corrective action. Most children who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade will not fare well in future educational experiences without significant changes in their learning environments. The research behind the effectiveness of social advancement and retention is mixed. Whether or not students are retained or advanced, it likely will require doing more, and doing it differently, in order to engage them so they can catch up with their peers.

What the Research Shows...

- Most students that are still struggling with reading by the end of third grade can still develop strong reading skills, but to do so requires different, as well as more, strategies to engage them and foster their reading development.
- Neither “social advancement” nor “retention” on their own reduces the prospects of subsequent school failure for children who are not reading by the end of third grade.
- Establishing “retention” policies for children not reading by the end of third grade can focus attention both on improving education in the early years and on providing additional support to students not reading by the end of third grade.

Grade Retention:

- “Grade retention, also known as non-promotion, flunking, failing, or being held back, refers to a student repeating his or her current grade level again the following year.”

Social Advancement:

- “Social advancement or promotion is the practice of promoting students with their same age-peers although they have not mastered current grade level content.”

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/revisedPDFs/graderetention.pdf

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/revisedPDFs/graderetention.pdf

- Grade retention or social advancement of children performing well below their peers, particularly in the early-elementary grades, long has been a source of academic discussion. While it generally has been concluded that children should not be “held back” in starting kindergarten (and parents should not voluntarily hold their children back) for reasons of maturity or “readiness,” there is not a similar consensus on what schools should do in the early-elementary grades, and particularly at the end of third grade, in advancing or retaining children who are far behind their peers, particularly in reading comprehension and literacy. For further information on the retention vs. social advancement debate, see the following articles:
• Retaining Students in Grade: A Literature Review of the Effects ofRetention on Students’Academic and Nonacademic Outcomes (RAND)

• Meta-Analysis of Grade Retention Research: Implications for Practice in the 21st Century (Shane R. Jimerson)

• While state legislatures and local school districts across the country have engaged in fierce debates over whether students should be retained or socially advanced, the true question we should be examining is, “What comprehensive actions can be taken to ensure that we are helping all students reach their educational potential?” Here are examples of interventions states have implemented to improve the reading proficiency of students still struggling at the end of third grade:
  ▪ Assignment to an academic improvement program
  ▪ Implementation of a home reading program
  ▪ Instruction outside of school hours including after school and Saturday school instruction
  ▪ Involvement of a reading specialist
  ▪ Summer school or summer reading program
  ▪ Instruction tailored specifically to students’ deficiencies/needs
  ▪ Assignment to a different teacher
  ▪ Online or computer-based instruction
  ▪ Supplemental instruction (during school hours)
  ▪ Individual or group tutoring

<table>
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<tr>
<th>States that Require or Recommend Alternative or Supplementary Interventions for Struggling Readers</th>
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- Individual or Group Tutoring: 12%
- Academic Improvement Program: 11%
- Home Reading Program: 9%
- Instruction Outside of School Hours: 16%
- Involvement of Reading Specialist: 3%
- Summer School/Reading Program: 16%
-个体化指导: 10%
- 作业与计算机为基础的指导: 4%
- 分配给不同的老师: 3%
- 个人或团体辅导: 12%

http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/03/47/10347.pdf
It is important to not simply do more, but also to do differently. The research on the effects of social advancement vs. retention of non-reading third-graders is mixed and open to interpretation—but, whether children are retained or advanced, there must be something different in place for them than they have experienced previously if they are to acquire the literacy skills they will need to advance. Merely completing the same curriculum with the same level of support a second time is not likely to make a difference on the development of a student’s literacy skills. There also may be some small declarative impact for setting a higher bar and expectation for student reading performance, but improving literacy must involve more than simply changing practices with respect to retention or advancement.