

FOREWORD

“Caring teachers with high expectations helped me read my way out. They helped me push against the currents of the environment in which I lived. They did not limit their aspirations for me because my pants were too short. They did not lower their expectations for me because my lunch application told them I lived below the poverty line.

Instead, they required me to read the basal textbook, as well as the local newspaper, historical documents, poetry, and literature. These teachers had Harvard dreams for students living in hellish conditions. I felt a kinship with them that helped me attend to their instruction.

Literacy was thrust upon me in rich and meaningful ways, not because I was a wonderful student, but because the teachers believed I deserved nothing less.”

– Dr. Alfred W. Tatum

Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males: Closing the Achievement Gap, p. 22

It has become clear during the past decade that focusing on the literacy development of students in Grades K-3 does not prevent difficulties with reading-related tasks as students enter adolescence. Students enrolled in Grades 4-12 throughout the United States deserve the same attention and commitment given to younger readers and writers. Unfortunately, the literacy development of these older students has been grossly neglected. This neglect has resulted in dismal reading achievement for a very high percentage of students who have moved beyond the third grade as reflected in the data provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Logically, it makes sense to give the literacy development of *all* children the attention it deserves; however, many educators are challenged when it comes to addressing the literacy needs of students in Grades 4-12. The task of helping students become “smarter” while helping them become better readers and writers seems overwhelming for many teachers who are trained in a particular discipline such as social studies, science or mathematics. This task is further complicated when students’ adolescent, cultural, gender and linguistic identities interplay with their literacy development.

To provide effective literacy instruction for all students, educators, parents and policymakers must be willing to wrestle with the “complex” older reader who needs support in schools and outside of schools. In short, multiple competencies are required to address the need of all students, and there is a need for better teacher preparation and professional development related to these issues.

The Connecticut State Department of Education recognizes the importance and urgency required to address the literacy needs of students in Grades 4-12 and across the content areas. Although the students in Connecticut are outperforming many of the students in the United States as indicated by the Nation’s Report Card, the Department believes there is more work to be done.

The Department is not satisfied with results indicating that more than 50 percent of Connecticut's fourth- and eighth-graders performed below the proficiency level of the NAEP. Extending *Connecticut's K-3 Blueprint for Reading Achievement* by giving robust attention to the literacy needs of students in Grades 4-12 can potentially mark a watershed moment in the education of Connecticut's students. A collaborative effort that included Connecticut teachers, literacy supervisors, university professors and education consultants has taken place to define this moment.

The Department provides this document that brings attention to literacy competencies needed to advance the literacy development of older students, multiple conclusions around comprehensive literacy instruction, several required teacher competencies that include more than knowledge about skill and strategy instruction, and information about comprehensive literacy instructional models. This document provides a broader, deeper, well-informed research-based orientation required to help older students develop into highly literate citizens. It also provides essential rallying points and professional development resources to support change at both the classroom level and schoolwide level.

It is refreshing to note that fewer older readers will suffer from low levels of literacy development because of the sincere effort being advanced by the Department. I am reminded of a high school student who informed me that "it is painful not knowing how to read." He then shared that he was on the cusp of dropping out because he was tired of being ridiculed. As we continued to talk, the young man indicated that he still wanted his teachers to care about him. He also wanted them to become committed to helping him the same way he was helped in the primary grades. Ultimately, he was suggesting that educators shared some culpability for his inability to handle written text with ease. Each of the principles of caring, commitment and culpability are contained within the document that follows. And, if embraced, more adolescents will find productive paths to drop into, and not think of ways of dropping out because of the pain associated with low levels of literacy.

The Department is sounding the siren and providing an additional blueprint to address the literacy needs of all students, including those older readers who still desperately need our attention.

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