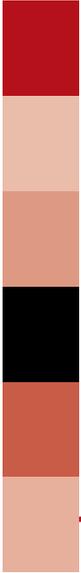


Issues in Brief

STATE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE ADOLESCENT LITERACY

**Results from NASBE's State
Adolescent Literacy Network**



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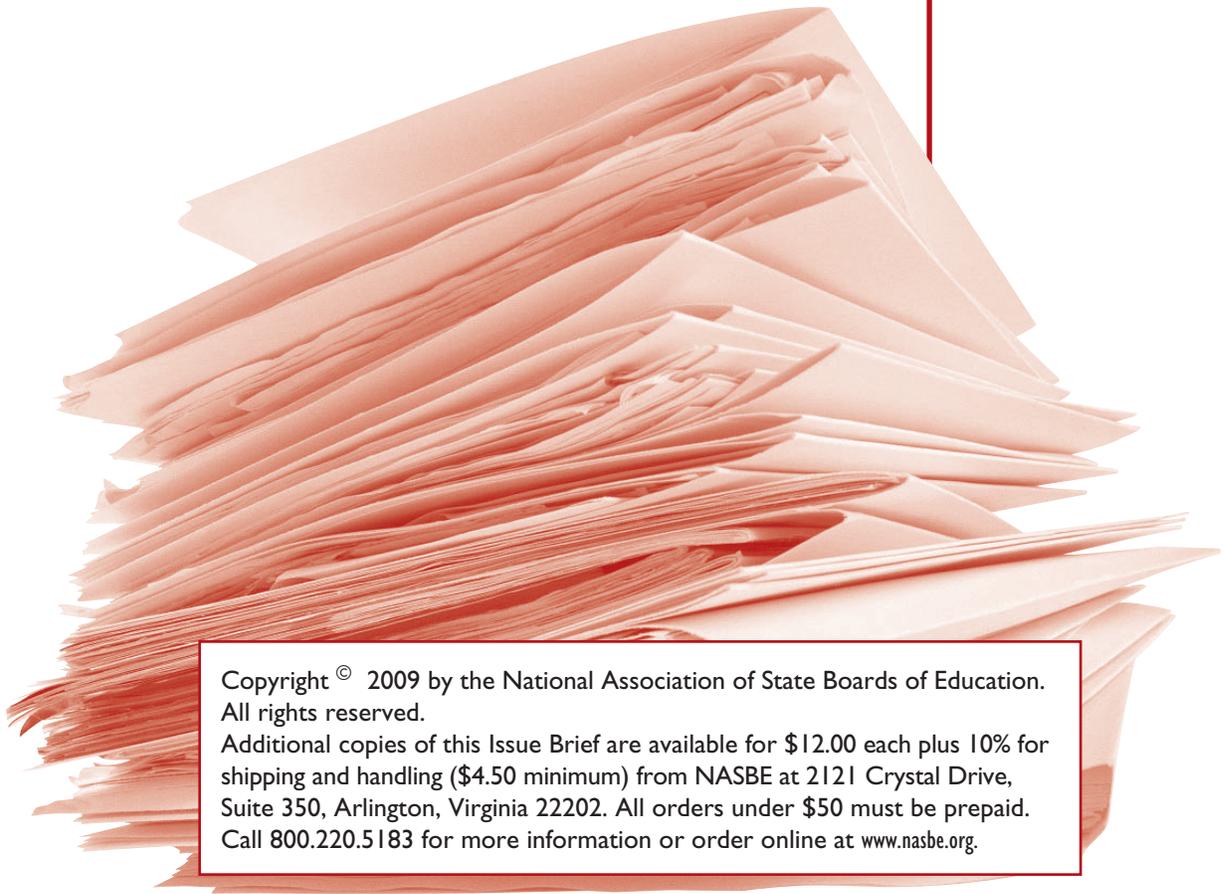
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STATE ACTIONS TO IMPROVE ADOLESCENT LITERACY

Results from NASBE's
State Adolescent Literacy Network

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Introduction

The urgency to advance literacy performance goes to the heart of what states consider their essential work: instituting standards-based reforms that ensure students are well-prepared to meet the demands of employment, advanced training, and civic participation. As literacy performance improves, student achievement rises not only in reading and writing but across the curriculum spectrum, a benefit that has profound consequences for delivering a high-level education to all young people. States recognize that all students will need sophisticated literacy skills to negotiate a rapidly changing global and knowledge-based economy.

But while policymakers acknowledge the importance of educating citizens to high levels of knowledge and skill, states and districts generally lack systematic strategies for scaling up literacy instruction as part of subject matter learning. So even though state education leaders are painfully aware of the prevailing low literacy levels for large numbers of adolescents, framing an organized response to solve the crisis has been daunting.

Beginning in 2007, with support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) began working with five states—Connecticut, Kentucky, New Hampshire, Utah, and West Virginia—that formed the *State Adolescent Literacy Network*. In this brief, 18-month period, the Network has been remarkably successful in building state policy frameworks and capacity to improve adolescent literacy. The Network states:

- created collaborative processes to engage stakeholders and policy leaders;
- developed comprehensive state plans to advance adolescent literacy;
- established policy structures to scale and sustain literacy improvements;
- integrated literacy as part of broad school improvement initiatives;
- built capacity and infrastructure to provide ongoing training, guidance, and supports for school-wide interventions; and
- strengthened teacher and leader preparation and professional development to integrate literacy instruction as part of content-area learning.

These states launched a serious examination of the problem of low literacy levels among the young citizens of their schools. Their collective activities, publications, and training forums reinforced the central importance of literacy to school improvement efforts and emphasized the importance of connecting literacy to other educational goals for secondary school redesign and increased academic rigor.

This report begins by summarizing the extent and challenges of the adolescent literacy crisis, then describes the NASBE State Adolescent Literacy Network and the important work accomplished by the Network states to address these challenges and enhance the capacity and performance of all levels of the system.

The Problem of Low Literacy Levels Nationwide

Large-scale national and international studies reveal that high numbers of young adults do not have the literacy skills needed to succeed in college and meet the demands of an increasingly competitive work environment. Beginning in the 1980s, reports by the National Commission on Excellence in Education and the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy documented the links between educational performance, literacy skills, and the U.S. economy; explained the likely impact on the education and skill requirements of jobs; and described the challenges for the nation's schools and teaching profession.¹

Despite these early warnings, there has been limited progress in improving high school graduation rates and strengthening the literacy skills of our students. According to a publication released in 2006 by the Alliance for Excellent Education, almost 7,000 students drop out of high school every school day—ultimately adding up to nearly one-third of all students dropping out nationally—many of whom read and write well below grade level.² In fact, estimates based on the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that about 70 percent of middle and high school students read below proficiency; the average reading scores of the nation's 13- and 17-year olds have flat-lined over the past two decades; and about 26 percent of 8th-grade students and 28 percent of 12th-grade public school students score below the “basic” level.

Equally disconcerting, literacy skills are unevenly distributed across groups defined by race and income: more than 40 percent of minority students fall at or below the basic level in reading achievement.³ It is estimated that about half of incoming 9th graders in urban, high-poverty schools read three years or more below grade level.⁴ This means that large numbers of entering students cannot comprehend factual information from their subject matter texts and struggle to form general understandings, develop interpretations, and make text connections.

Key Report Takeaways

- Far too many secondary students are not able to read well enough to comprehend challenging content in their textbooks.
- College and work preparedness will not significantly improve until we improve adolescent literacy.
- Literacy improvements must be done within the context of core academic subjects, not apart from content instruction.
- For states, literacy policies and initiatives should be part of overall state improvement efforts (e.g., student standards, teacher preparation policies, etc.), not just another add-on program.
- All teachers, no matter their content area, must have knowledge of research-based literacy instruction appropriate for their subject. Large-scale improvements in adolescent literacy will not happen until there are significant changes in classroom instruction.
- Collaboration, both within state education agencies and with key stakeholder groups, is necessary for real literacy improvements to take hold.
- The role of higher education in preparing teachers to have knowledge of research-based literacy instruction is essential, but strengthening teacher education poses formidable challenges to states.
- NASBE's Adolescent Literacy Network was able to produce real changes in state focus and policies in a relatively short amount of time—but even the most successful states need more time to develop and implement their strategies.

These differences in literacy skills are accompanied by substantial differences in graduation rates, college entrance, labor-force participation rates, annual earnings, and access to lifelong learning. International assessment studies report that young people in the United States are losing ground in relation to their peers in many developed nations, as well. A 2007 commentary in *Education Week* noted that “Reforms aimed at improving reading achievement seem to have propelled Russia, Hong Kong, and Singapore from middle to top rankings [on the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)], even as U.S. performance stood still.”⁵

Other disturbing trends within American’s education system have come to the fore regarding the inequities in the level of support, instructional quality, and learning opportunities provided to students across the country. Studies measuring the impact of family background on international assessments identified consistent patterns for the United States: it ranks in the top quarter of the most unequal countries based on the performance gaps for students from different family backgrounds. Other countries across the world such as Japan, Korea, Finland, and Canada do a much better job of leveling the educational opportunities for students from lower income families.⁶

In responding to the question of what’s more important for a nation’s sustained growth—producing a group of high performers or bringing everyone up to a basic level of performance—economists have concluded that, “increasing the average level of literacy will have a greater effect on growth than increasing the percentage of individuals who achieve high levels of literacy skills.”⁷ There is now broad agreement that if we are unable to close the existing skills gaps among different demographic groups and substantially boost literacy levels overall, we will not be able to meet the demands of a world-class education system.

The Challenge for States

To bolster the nation’s economic competitiveness, states have moved to increase the requirements for all students to complete a college- and career-ready curriculum and to meet benchmark

standards in order to graduate. But even as secondary students grapple with more demanding curricula and subject matter text, the nature of instruction delivered in content area classes has remained largely the same. As a literacy report from the Education Alliance at Brown University states, “Despite what we know, there is a large breach between research and practice—and a marked reluctance on the part of many middle and high schools to focus on literacy support at the district, school, or even departmental level. And, therefore, despite the urgency, there is limited understanding of how to bring these effective literacy strategies to life in the content-area classroom in ways that will make a positive difference for students.”⁸

The gap between what we know and what we actually do in terms of effective instruction has persisted even in the face of massive investments in school improvement efforts over the past several decades. Michael Fullan, professor of policy studies at the University of Toronto, contends that reform efforts have failed to focus specifically on what needs to be improved in instructional practice in order to make a significant difference in student learning.⁹ And in a recent Institute of Education Sciences report, Michael Kamil notes that the realities of student reading difficulties and the lack of teacher preparation to address them have been well-documented for at least 50 years. He urges policy leaders to address the role of *all* teachers in working toward higher levels of literacy among *all* adolescents, regardless of their reading abilities.¹⁰

The good news is that during this timeframe, a great deal has been learned about adolescent literacy and about the types of interventions and approaches that have strong effects on students’ reading and writing performance (for example, providing explicit vocabulary; employing strategy instruction such as summarizing, generating questions, and using advance organizers; and providing intensive and individualized interventions for struggling readers).¹¹ (See textbox showing effect sizes on opposite page.)

Literacy performance is enhanced when students receive explicit instruction, modeling, and guid-

Instructional Strategies That Impact Student Reading Achievement

| Strategies for Reading ¹² | Effect Size* | Percentile Gain |
|--|--------------|-----------------|
| <p>Cooperative Learning Students work on a defined comprehension task in small groups that function as an instructional tool whereby students can work together to arrive at a solution to a learning problem.</p> | .73 | 27 |
| <p>Generating and Answering Questions Students actively process text to form questions, a meta-cognitive step that increases their own awareness of how well they understood the text.</p> | .61 | 23 |
| <p>Identifying Similarities and Differences Students enhance their understanding and ability to use knowledge through various representations including comparing, classifying, and creating metaphors and analogies.</p> | 1.61 | 45 |
| <p>Nonlinguistic Representations Students visualize the relationships among important structural elements of the text through spatial representations including graphic organizers, semantic maps, and concept maps that can be completed before, during, or after reading.</p> | .75 | 27 |
| <p>Setting Purposes and Providing Feedback Students personalize their learning by monitoring their own comprehension—deciding whether or not they understanding the text while they are reading and learning how to resolve reading problems by rereading or restating.</p> | .61 | 23 |
| <p>Summarizing and Note Taking Students focus on the main ideas in the text, while simultaneously excluding extraneous information, which helps them to process the text closely and make judgments about the information’s relative importance.</p> | 1.0 | 34 |
| Strategies for Writing ¹³ | Effect Size | Percentile Gain |
| <p>Collaborative Writing Students work in peer team instructional arrangements to plan, draft, revise, and edit compositions.</p> | .75 | 27 |
| <p>Sentence Combining Students construct more complex and sophisticated sentences by combining two or more basic sentences, which integrates traditional grammar instruction alongside higher-order processes.</p> | .50 | 19 |
| <p>Specific Product Goals Students set reachable goals for their writing including a specific purpose (e.g., to persuade) and characteristics of the final product.</p> | .70 | 26 |
| <p>Writing Strategies Students approach compositions using explicit, systematic strategies for planning, revising, and/or editing text.</p> | .82 | 29 |

*An effect size is exactly equivalent to a “Z-score” of a standard normal distribution. For example, in row 1, an effect size of .73 means that the score of the average person exposed to cooperative learning scored .73 standard deviations above the scores of the average student who was not exposed to the strategy, and this corresponds to a percentile gain of about 27 points. Note that in general, effect sizes for instructional strategies are greater for students who were behind than the average effect size for students across the full range of ability in regular classrooms.

ance in using evidence-based comprehensive strategies through reading and writing activities. Results are best when these strategies are employed in the early grades and continue through high school, using texts that cover different subjects. We know that strategic instruction has a powerful impact when combined with problem-solving approaches to discipline-based reading and when used in context by students to connect ideas with the student's background knowledge and interests.

Effective literacy instruction incorporates these important features:

- it recognizes the importance of student engagement and motivation in literacy development;
- it integrates specific literacy strategies throughout all content areas to maximize learning;
- it connects reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking;
- it uses data to identify student needs and adjusts instruction accordingly; and
- it uses research-based literacy strategies for teaching and learning.

Unfortunately, many states have yet to develop coherent policies and structures to support, scale up, and sustain high-quality literacy instruction throughout the K-12 system. There are several reasons behind this lack of literacy instruction, but one thing is abundantly clear: such instruction necessitates having well-prepared teachers who have adequate knowledge of language and reading psychology and who can manage reading programs based on assessments of individual students' needs. Accordingly, policies, structures, and systems must be crafted to leverage improvements in the quality of instructional practice. We must ensure that effective practice is common practice—that it's not just for the fortunate few, but for all students.

Yet studies and surveys of teacher knowledge about reading development and difficulties

“It has been easier for policymakers and educators alike to focus attention on the early grades and hope that success in the primary years will translate to resolving the problems in our middle and high schools. Research and data show this is not the case.”

show that many teachers are not prepared to teach reading. And despite the importance and complexity of reading, universities and licensing programs have seriously underestimated the literacy knowledge and training teachers need. Currently, preparation of middle and high school teachers generally focuses on content knowledge related to a teacher's specific discipline and, at best, requires only a single generic course in reading to meet state licensure requirements. As a consequence, secondary teachers view their job as teaching the subject rather than explicitly teaching students the specific literacy needed to understand their subject.

For the most part, it has been easier for policymakers and educators alike to focus attention on the early grades and hope that success in the primary years will translate to resolving the problems in our middle and high schools. Research and data show this is not the case.¹⁴ Far too many students are leaving school early and those who do persist and earn a high school diploma leave with weak skills and insufficient knowledge. Clearly, without paying attention to the quality of the teaching profession and building the capacity to provide literacy instruction within content area classes, efforts to strengthen public education will continue to stall.

In fact, the national dialogue on the next wave of school reform has focused attention on the need to ensure systematic investments in the knowledge and skill of educators. A recent report examining teacher development in the United States and abroad revealed significant shortfalls

in the opportunities provided to teachers in this country as compared with high-achieving nations around the world, which have been making substantial and sustained investments in professional learning for teachers for the last two decades.¹⁵ Research findings are clear that in order to change teacher practice and improve student learning, teachers must have ongoing, intensive, professional development that includes applying knowledge to teachers' planning and instruction. Professional development that offers substantial contact time ranging from 30 to 100 hours in total spread over six to 12 months boosted students achievement by about 21 percentile points. But efforts that were more limited, ranging from 5 to 14 hours total, showed no significant effect on student learning.¹⁶

Traditional structures for professional learning in the United States fall short of the kinds of experiences that are needed to build teacher capacity and catalyze transformations in instructional practice. Research shows that few teachers have access to high-quality, intensive professional development: more than half (57 percent) of U.S. teachers responding to the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) said they had received no more than 16 hours of professional development in the previous 12 months in their content area. More than two-thirds of teachers nationally reported that they had not even had one day of training in supporting the learning of special education or limited English proficiency (LEP) students during the previous three years.¹⁷

Furthermore, many states have yet to create a coherent plan for developing the policies and infrastructure needed to strengthen the capacity of educators to deliver high-quality instruction to adolescents—particularly one that includes new kinds of literacy instruction as part of content area learning. Only a small number of states have comprehensive literacy programs in the secondary grades. Efforts have more commonly been made at the margins, with scattered sites served by a disparate collection of programs, while instruction in most secondary classrooms remains impervious to significant change.

State policymakers need focused assistance and support to become more engaged in developing

and overseeing comprehensive literacy policies that address the reading needs of students along the entire K-12 continuum. In order to ensure that graduates are prepared for college and the workforce, instruction and school organization need to be redesigned to incorporate advanced literacy skills into all subject areas. State leaders need to plan a comprehensive approach for providing strategic and school-wide interventions to advance literacy and commit to ensuring that all students have access to the teachers, resources, and supports they need.

Launch of NASBE's State Adolescent Literacy Network

In the spring of 2007, NASBE brought together ten state teams to work on identifying a set of actionable strategies to bring to scale improvements in those practices that have been demonstrated to be effective in advancing literacy performance.¹⁸ The work was based on recommendations from NASBE's 2005 report, *Reading at Risk: The State Response to the Crisis in Adolescent Literacy*, that highlight the research on adolescent literacy and clarify the linkages to state policies and structures that support literacy instruction as part of core subject areas.¹⁹

The NASBE initiative obligated participating state boards of education to lead teams in designing strategies and policies to strengthen adolescent literacy as central to ensuring high levels of achievement for all students. State boards of education are uniquely positioned to address improving adolescent literacy given their broad authority for performance standards and assessment, teacher and leader development, and school improvement—all of which must be strategically interrelated to increase student's literacy performance in subject areas. In contrast to projects that affect a limited number of specific schools or initiate a training program, the NASBE initiative focused on the broad authority of state boards of education for policies and structures that can impact literacy instruction at the classroom level—and do this all across the state.

The state teams attended an initial informational and planning conference that gave them the

Action Steps for Implementing a Comprehensive, State-Local Approach to Improving Literacy Instruction

- 1) Develop a high-quality teacher workforce that understands the importance of literacy instruction and how to integrate it into content area classrooms.
- 2) Use data to identify student needs and monitor the efficacy of instruction.
- 3) Develop district literacy plans for implementing research-based literacy support strategies.
- 4) Design organizational structures and leadership capacities to sustain and enact these elements strategically.
- 5) Apply accountability and oversight mechanisms to ensure sound implementation of literacy plans.

opportunity to become well-grounded in the issues, including what is at stake, the extensive research base in literacy instruction, and the roles that must be played at all levels. During this introductory phase, the teams were asked to rethink how to link state policy and structures with specific improvements in literacy instruction at the classroom level. Consistent with the overarching recommendation from *Reading at Risk*, NASBE project staff encouraged states to develop and vigorously implement a statewide literacy plan as part of their overall school improvement initiatives. Efforts targeted improving students' literacy skills by teaching them *within the context of core academic subjects*, rather than apart from content instruction.

To help states in this effort, NASBE staff used an approach based on joint problem-solving, collaborative practice, and reciprocal accountability, as outlined in NASBE's 2007 publication, *From State Policy to Classroom Practice: Improving Literacy Instruction for All Students*.²⁰ This guide details the actions that must be taken at the state, district, school, and classroom levels to impact instruction so that students are successfully engaged in purposeful reading and writing in all subjects. It is premised on the idea of reciprocal accountability—which

means that at each level, the roles and responsibilities of key players must contribute to enhancing the capacity and performance of those at the next level (e.g., states for districts, superintendents for principals, principals for teachers, and teachers for students). See Appendix B, "Improving Literacy Instruction: Moving from State Policy to Classroom Practice," which organizes actions at each level of the system into five areas: Planning, Quality of Teaching, Use of Data, Instructional Infrastructure, and Accountability.

A central tenet of the NASBE project is that state leaders must pay attention to how each policy and action ultimately works to leverage improvements at the "technical core" of education: the interactions of teachers and students around the content to be learned. This effort at the state level can be as difficult and complicated as it is important. To be successful, states must work closely with teachers, higher education, agency staff, and external partners to design policies, structures, and supports that change organizational culture within schools and instructional practice within classrooms. Of critical importance, states must ensure that teachers are able to provide quality literacy instruction as part of a rigorous curriculum.

Project staff guided states in leveraging regulations and incentives to ensure continuous improvement of classroom instruction. States were asked to 1) identify how each policy and action could help make literacy instruction a core facet of content area learning and 2) target the important policy levers to make linkages between regulation and effective practice transparent and consistent.

State Grants for Adolescent Literacy

States participating in the planning conference were able to apply for a grant to support further work on a state-led literacy initiative to be implemented within the context of core academic subjects and as part of the state's overall school improvement plan. The year-long project required states to commit to a team approach, establish ongoing collaborative partnerships, and develop and implement a work plan to advance state efforts to provide adolescents with content-based literacy instruction, and a continuum of supports for struggling readers. State applicants were expected to make concrete progress in developing and implementing actionable strategies to serve a range of purposes. They could be broad-based in order to foster a sense of urgency and public support—but they also needed to demonstrate specific linkages between policy actions and specific long-term impacts. These impacts could be in areas such as strengthening the training and support for teachers in delivering effective reading and writing across the curriculum or early identification of struggling readers and providing a continuum of supports.

The project required state boards of education to lead interdisciplinary teams, serve as a strategic partner in integrating literacy into school improvement initiatives, and develop policies to ultimately improve adolescent literacy statewide. The states were also asked to describe the status of adolescent literacy in their state, including a) what policies and structures were available to identify students' literacy needs and monitor progress and b) how adolescent literacy currently relates to state accountability systems for increasing college and career readiness and closing achievement gaps.

States had considerable discretion in determining their strategies. But it was essential that state plans showed viable approaches to building the state's capacity to improve reading achievement in secondary schools, such as:

- engaging stakeholders in creating a comprehensive literacy plan to build instructional capacity and sustain improvements in adolescent literacy;
- integrating literacy plans into the state's overall framework for standards-based educational improvements;
- strengthening teacher licensure and preparation to ensure that all teachers have the necessary preparation and supports to provide high-quality, content-area literacy instruction;
- transforming system-wide infrastructures so that secondary school students receive literacy instruction within subject areas and so a continuum of supports is available for struggling readers; and
- crafting school improvement and accreditation policies that drive local implementation of school-wide literacy plans.

After an independent proposal review, NASBE issued the grant to five states—Connecticut, Kentucky, New Hampshire, Utah, and West Virginia—under the auspices of their respective state boards of education. The grant provided direct support and technical assistance to state boards and state agency staff for the design of structural and systemic supports for improving adolescent literacy in middle and high schools.

State teams completed action plans that outlined core strategies to put into place the pieces required for systemic success in developing and implementing school-wide literacy instruction. State strategies focused on the elements outlined in *From State Policy to Classroom Practice* related to planning, improving the quality of teaching, using data, creating an instructional infrastructure, and incorporating accountability measures to advance school-wide literacy within content

area learning. Action plans delineated steps to integrate literacy instruction in English language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science; organize structures to provide highly specialized instruction for struggling readers; administer screening, progress monitoring, and diagnostic assessments as needed; and guide leadership teams and district offices in supporting teachers in delivering research-based literacy instruction. Working with practitioners, higher education, agency staff, and other key constituencies, states employed incremental, iterative processes to make improvements—taking stock of what currently exists and testing new approaches prior to widespread adoption.

Project Accomplishments

The Network members succeeded in crafting a variety of approaches to building state and local capacity to implement the features of a broad literacy initiative, and at the same time adopted a range of accountability and oversight mechanisms to sustain these efforts beyond the grant period. The strategies adopted by the states clustered around five elements:

- Adopting comprehensive literacy plans;
- Building knowledge about the research and issues related specifically to adolescent literacy;
- Strengthening teacher licensure and preparation to ensure that all teachers have the necessary preparation and supports to provide high-quality, content-area literacy instruction;
- Addressing system-wide infrastructure to provide literacy instruction within subject areas and a continuum of supports for struggling readers; and
- Creating policy structures and supports to drive local implementation of district and school literacy plans.

Each of these strategic elements, accompanied by state examples, are described in more detail on the following pages.

1. Adopting comprehensive literacy plans to provide all students with research-based reading and writing instruction throughout the curriculum, as well as a continuum of supports and interventions for struggling readers, beginning in the early grades and continuing through high school.

The major recommendation from NASBE's 2007 report on adolescent literacy was for states to develop and vigorously implement a comprehensive statewide literacy plan that is woven into the framework of the state's overall vision for standards-based education. Despite the short timeframe for accomplishing the strategies outlined in the grant, during the 2007–08 school year all five of the states in NASBE's Network developed signature plans that outlined the goals and objectives for improving adolescent literacy. Developed by committees composed of state board members and other policymakers, agency staff, higher education representatives, teachers, business leaders, and reading experts, the plans share common features, including:

- A focus on the interconnectedness of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking and integrating instruction to advance literacy performance within curricular areas;
- Cultivation of knowledgeable, responsive teachers who can effectively use content-area text, written materials, and technology in teaching the core ideas and concepts of their discipline;
- Recommendations to use a tiered intervention model to provide differentiated levels of literacy instruction for struggling readers;
- Establishing literacy standards for student and teachers—raising literacy expectations across the curriculum for all students in all grades;
- Strengthening teacher licensure and preparation to ensure that all teachers have the necessary preparation and supports to provide high-quality, content-area literacy instruction; and

- Crafting accountability mechanisms (along with providing supports and resources) for local literacy initiatives.

States worked with broad coalitions and the research community to establish the central elements of the state plan and decide how to leverage policy so that the plan will be fully implemented in districts, schools, and classrooms. This has been a complex undertaking that required states to identify the key instructional and infrastructure improvements necessary to foster content-specific reading and writing instruction in schools. It meant states had to audit their current structures and systems, identify weaknesses and inconsistencies, and reach consensus on actionable strategies to bring about statewide improvements in adolescent literacy.

In Kentucky, recognizing the increased literacy demands placed on young people to succeed in college or the workplace, the state board of education chose to focus on literacy at the adolescent level (grades 6-12) as a top priority. We will “ensure high levels of student achievement,” the board stated in its 2007-08 Strategic Work Priorities, “through an increasing focus on critical thinking skills across the curriculum; elementary, middle, and high school mathematics; funding to systematically address adolescent literacy; and ensuring the delivery of targeted instructional interventions.”

The centerpiece of the state’s effort was the establishment of the Adolescent Literacy Task Force, directed by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and charged with developing a state literacy plan. The Task Force, which includes two state board members and a broad group of diverse stakeholders, forged a set of recommendations that built on lessons learned from locally implemented literacy initiatives, such as the state’s Striving Readers Program, Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project, and professional development initiatives. (See textbox on page 14 for more details about Kentucky’s ongoing efforts.)

Kentucky leaders recognized the need to develop a communications plan to reinforce their vision that literacy improvements are central to the

state’s overarching reform efforts. A great deal of effort was devoted to garnering public and political support; securing buy-in on the need for extensive professional development statewide, as well as working across divisions within KDE. As a result, the Kentucky legislature passed a Joint Resolution on Adolescent Literacy in the 2008 session that supports KDE’s efforts to “develop a cohesive and comprehensive statewide literacy plan that builds instructional and leadership capacity, sustains continuous improvements in literacy, especially adolescent literacy, and identifies policies and practices to improve the literacy of the Commonwealth’s children.” The KDE plan and its initial recommendations were submitted to the Kentucky State Board of Education in 2008 and will be submitted to the Interim Joint Legislative Committee on Education by December 1, 2009.

In a similar vein, New Hampshire and Connecticut launched efforts to develop and disseminate comprehensive literacy plans that recognize the urgency required to address the literacy needs of students across all grade levels and content areas. They, too, positioned literacy as a top priority and as part of broader initiatives such as high school redesign, personalizing instruction for diverse learners, eliminating dropouts, preparing learners for a 21st century global economy, and supporting low-performing schools and districts. Approved by the New Hampshire State Board of Education in 2007, the *Prek-16 Literacy Action Plan for the 21st Century*, provides essential understandings about 21st century learning and outlines cross-cutting principles related to the reading process, the development of a proficient reader, and the essential components of effective school-wide literacy instruction.²¹ Reading and writing are at the core of the work of the P-16 Council, which includes the commissioner of education, the state board chair, the governor, the chancellor of the university system, and the head of the Business and Industry Association.

Connecticut’s comprehensive literacy plan, *Beyond the Blueprint: Literacy in Grades 4-12 and Across the Content Areas*, also dovetailed with the state’s overarching strategic goals. As outlined in its current five-year plan for education, Connecticut’s major educational objectives center

Kentucky's Ongoing Adolescent Literacy Initiatives

- Kentucky's *Striving Readers Program*, a federally funded research project, provides professional development to content area teachers in 21 middle and high schools in seven rural school districts and to literacy coaches for intensive intervention models for struggling readers. One of its primary purposes is to build a strong research base on what works in improving literacy and reading achievement among students in grades 6-12. All schools involved in the project implement the Learning Strategies Curriculum for the Strategic Instruction Model through intervention classes in seventh and ninth grades. The model provides struggling learners who are two or more years below grade level with explicit instruction and practice within a number of literacy domains and in applied skills development. In addition, each school implements the Collaborative Model for Content Literacy. Preliminary findings indicate that teachers in the program exhibit significantly higher skills for literacy teaching than teachers in matched schools without the program.
- The *Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project* provides training to teachers in grades 4–12 to serve as school literacy coaches. Twenty-nine districts, 52 schools, and six universities participate in providing monthly sessions (for graduate credit) on content-area literacy coaching and mentoring. Overall, the outcomes indicate significant advances in promoting the specialized field of literacy coaching, including a strengthened state infrastructure, increased university capacity to deliver course work, and more school/district leadership training. For example, in comparison to matched schools without literacy coaches, a higher percentage of schools were involved in strategic planning around literacy and more teachers received professional development on improving student reading skills in their content areas.
- KDE designs and implements a range of professional development opportunities to strengthen content area literacy and interventions for struggling readers (e.g., Regional Special Education Collaboratives and the Kentucky Writing Project). In addition, the Kentucky *Content Literacy Initiative* was launched in fall 2008 with funding from the state's Teacher and Leadership Mentor Funds. The grant supports the collaborative work of higher education, educational cooperatives, schools, and other partners in efforts to improve the performance of middle and high school teachers, administrators, and students in the areas of literacy, content-area literacy, and interventions for struggling readers.

on preparing all students for “lifelong learning and careers in a competitive, global economy” through “a rigorous literacy-based curriculum linked to authentic, real-life experiences.”²²

The plans provide detailed information about what constitutes comprehensive literacy instruction models, strategies that facilitate learning across content areas, and the infrastructure needed to support best practices in literacy instruction. These states emphasized the importance of focusing on the literacy competencies that teachers need to help older students and called upon school leaders and teacher educators to share in

the responsibility for providing teachers with the requisite training and supports. As stated in the New Hampshire Literacy Plan, “Without the necessary infrastructure, schools only see pockets of excellence in literacy instruction and anecdotal evidence of success.”²³

2. Integrating literacy plans into the state's overall framework for standards-based educational improvements.

Integrating literacy as part of secondary curricula and improvement initiatives requires aligning organizational structures, resource allocation, and

accountability systems in support of an overarching strategy. States must attend to improving the coherence up and down the layers of the system by creating a common language and shared focus on desired literacy instruction and performance, reorganizing functions across departments and programs, leveraging expertise and resources, and building responsive trusting relationships with districts and schools.

A key role for NASBE was helping the states strengthen the linkages between overarching educational goals and initiatives involving specific improvements in classroom literacy instruction. State teams reported that literacy efforts received more strategic attention and greater traction if positioned within a larger reform framework or system such as secondary school redesign for college/career readiness, supports to schools and districts in need of improvement under the state's accountability provisions, teacher and school leadership, and special education Response to Intervention programs (RtI). In order to strengthen statewide implementation, the Network states focused specifically on raising instructional quality and improving teachers' competencies in delivering content-area literacy instruction in lieu of one-size-fits-all programs and curricula.

West Virginia, for example, embedded literacy performance standards *and* instructional strategies into its principal improvement initiative—*The Partnership for 21st Century Skills*, which frames its educational policies, accountability system, professional development, and instructional resources. As a result, the state incorporated literacy strands into its revised content standards and objectives and provided greater flexibility and guidance to districts and schools on the implementation of school-wide literacy models.

Utah, West Virginia, Kentucky, and New Hampshire developed blueprints and training for schools to implement data-driven, tiered models of literacy instruction in collaboration with special education and Title I RtI programs. These problem-solving methods, which link research-based practice, professional development, assessment, and progress monitoring, are described extensively in the research literature.²⁴ They focus

on core content learning and on providing a framework for organizing complementary sets of literacy strategies, skills, and interventions across the full range of student proficiency levels. They share the essential goals and features of RtI models, which have been deployed broadly as part of federal special education and Title I initiatives. (See textbox on RtI on page 16.)

These states also linked literacy improvements to accountability systems. In Utah, for example, accreditation policies require schools to show evidence of interventions for underserved populations; plans are underway to expand this provision to include students who are not reading at grade level. Likewise, secondary schools receiving Title I funds must address in school improvement plans how they plan to intervene on behalf of striving readers. In New Hampshire, statewide implementation of its *PreK-16 Literacy Action Plan for the 21st Century* provides the conceptual underpinnings for the state's ambitious agenda to create state assessments, redesign high schools, and provide assistance to districts and schools in need of improvement. The state is proposing to rate the supports and programs provided to adolescent learners as part of the school and district accreditation system.

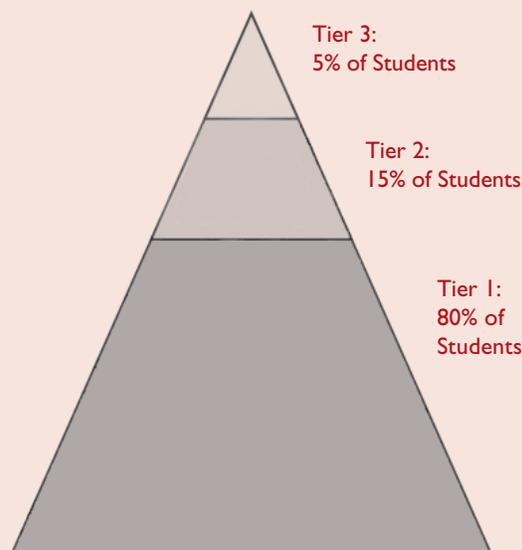
3. Strengthening teacher licensure and preparation to ensure that all teachers have the necessary preparation and supports to provide high-quality, content-area literacy instruction.

A central tenet of the NASBE project is that standards-based reforms will fail if these reforms do not significantly improve the quality of classroom instruction. In order to embed effective reading and writing instruction across the curriculum, states must help improve the performance of educators at every level of the system. Thus, NASBE saw that the success of its literacy project was directly related to how much and how wisely each state *invested in teachers* to ensure they have the preparation, professional development, and supports needed to provide effective, content-based literacy instruction.

Accordingly, the Network states developed strategies to strengthen the capacity and knowledge of

Response to Intervention (RtI)

Response to Intervention (RtI) uses a multi-tiered model to provide high-quality, research-based instruction in accord with students' needs. In the 2004 reauthorization of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, Congress endorsed the application of RtI to create more fluid systems that integrate general and special education, focus on early identification of students' problems, attend to instructional science, and use progress monitoring of individual growth. Tiered models of instruction range from core instructional interventions at the whole class level to more intensive interventions that involve short-term, small group, or individualized instruction in targeted areas. RtI's three-tier model adapts well to school-wide implementation of content area literacy instruction. It helps school staff maximize resource allocation, ensure high-quality instruction and curriculum in all classrooms, and differentiate instructional intensity for individual students as needed.



RtI Three-Tier Model

Tier 1: Core Instruction

In Tier 1, districts must ensure that school organization, curriculum, and instruction are likely to bring most students to acceptable levels of literacy proficiency. This means that all students engage in strategic reading, writing, and use of multiple technologies as part of a rigorous, validated core curriculum. Teachers must have the knowledge and skills to integrate vocabulary development, comprehension strategies, and writing processes as part of strong content-area learning. Schools use literacy screenings to identify each student's level of proficiency.

Tier 2: Targeted Short-Term Interventions

In Tier 2, supplemental instruction is provided to students who are not making adequate progress in developing literacy skills in Tier 1. Diagnostic and formative assessments are used to help identify students who fall below benchmark performance. Staff customize evidence-based practices for individual students and/or implement standard intervention protocols in accord with the assessment results. Students receive more explicit, structured instruction in small groups and then return to Tier 1 level, where their progress continues to be monitored. Organizational features at this level include time with skilled teachers, reduced teacher/pupil ratios, and flexible grouping.

Tier 3: Intensive Instruction

In Tier 3, students who are significantly behind or do not progress in Tier 2 are given extended, intensive interventions customized for their individual needs. Students receive highly specialized reading and writing instruction that is explicit, intensive, accelerated, and provides ample practice. Group size is smaller and daily literacy instruction extends for longer periods of time. It may or may not lead to identification for special education.

Implementation of RtI models have expanded owing to advancements in scientifically based curriculum and instruction and measurement technology. Such models are firmly entrenched in federal special education law and policy, and many states provide leadership in using multi-tier models of education resource delivery. These models require extensive professional development for teachers, specialists, and school leaders, as well as close collaboration among different specialties and departments (such as special education, Title I, English language arts, bilingual education) to synchronize program goals and improvement efforts.

teachers to improve reading and writing across the curriculum. States embedded extensive material on the teaching requirements of effective grade 4-12 literacy instruction in their state plans, emphasizing the research on instructional strategies to improve reading and writing skills. They recognized that balancing content learning and literacy places many demands on teachers and explored the forms of training, resources, and supports teachers would need to succeed. These included:

- changes to standards, preservice programs, and professional development;
- creation of study groups and professional communities;
- classroom-based coaching and modeling;
- print and web-based resource materials; and
- strong support from district and school leaders.

NASBE encouraged states to lay the groundwork for integrating literacy improvements through the design and implementation of pilot models. For example, Connecticut conducted a year-long pilot of a flexible training model designed to shape preservice programs and serve as a low-cost, literacy-based instructional support for school districts. The lead collaborators designed action plans, developed formative assessments and rubrics for literacy instruction strategies, defined content area literacy instruction, and provided strong clinical components to preservice teachers. Qualitative measures indicated a significant increase in the amount of content-relevant reading and writing throughout each of the subject areas. Based on preliminary findings, the state board and agency staff committed to infusing literacy instruction across all content areas in middle and high schools and strengthening literacy coursework and clinical experiences within teacher preservice programs.

Specifically, the Connecticut State Board of Education's recommendations specified actions in changing certification regulations to require a minimum of one content-based literacy course for those receiving 7-12 and K-12 certification.

Further action would include working with higher education institutions to develop preservice teacher programs that include at least one full-year course focused on literacy (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) embedded in specialized content areas, as well as fieldwork where preservice teachers are given classroom opportunities to implement literacy strategies in middle or high school classrooms.

Beginning in August 2007, West Virginia launched its four-tiered Adolescent Instruction Model (AIM) for Literacy pilot in six middle and high schools. Under the AIM framework schools identify a literacy leadership team; develop a professional development plan based on a self-assessment survey; establish a regular grade-level team or department meeting to analyze student assessment information, model and practice lessons and problem solve; design a diagnostic flow chart; and establish an assessment plan. Based on the individual pilot school's self-assessment, the state provided extensive professional development to literacy teams and monitored their implementation throughout the year.

In addition, the outcomes from the pilot schools showed increases in:

- literacy awareness in all content classes;
- targeted instruction and interventions;
- use of small group instruction in all content classes;
- the number of assessments for learning and modifications made to enhance learning;
- participation in learning communities where teachers read, discussed, and wrote about adolescent literacy;
- the involvement of school leadership; and
- the development of literacy leadership teams at each school.

Beginning in 2009, the pilot schools are serving as demonstration models as the state works to ex-

pand implementation of AIM to an additional 54 middle schools throughout the state. Expansion of the AIM framework will be supported by an extensive resource and training network established through the state's regional service centers and university partners.

As part of a comprehensive professional development program, New Hampshire trained a cadre of school improvement coaches in the use of literacy instructional practices to guide classroom instruction and is in the process of developing a handbook for literacy coaches. Literacy coaches are contracted locally to provide assistance in implementing content-based literacy instruction. The state education department also established a collaborative project with NH READS (Reading Excellence Across Disciplines), supported by a federal Title II grant.²⁵ Other partners include the Southeastern Regional Education Service Center, Plymouth State University, and three pilot partner districts in providing training and school consultation focused on integrating research-based literacy strategies into specific content areas. In August 2008, NH READS and its partners conducted a summer institute on comprehension strategy instruction widely attended by district and school educators.

Building off lessons learned from its Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project and Striving Readers Program, the Kentucky Department of Education, in partnership with higher education, is creating literacy leadership modules for principal preparation programs and for the state's new teacher leadership endorsement for delivery in 2009. By integrating educator competencies specific to delivering high-quality content-based literacy instruction, the state has taken important steps to strengthen the capacity and knowledge of teachers and school leaders in improving reading and writing across the curriculum.

4. Addressing system-wide infrastructure to provide adolescent learners with literacy instruction within subject areas and to provide a continuum of supports for struggling readers.

In order to fully support coordinated literacy instruction within content areas, states must shift

“To fully support coordinated literacy instruction within content areas, states must shift their role from compliance monitoring to a service orientation whereby they provide well-designed guidance, support, and tools for districts, schools, and educators.”

their role from compliance monitoring to a service orientation whereby they provide well-designed guidance, support, and tools for districts, schools, and educators. This requires implementing system-wide elements that have been shown to be effective in advancing literacy in districts and schools, including: fostering a culture of shared accountability for student learning; designing regional and central offices in support of schools; providing abundant resources on research-based practices; and providing multiple indicators (including diagnostic and formative assessments) to identify the literacy performance of individual students.

New Hampshire devoted considerable resources to disseminating its *Prek-16 Literacy Plan* and providing a network of supports to promote local implementation. With support from policy leaders, the state held a leadership institute for 22 school districts and higher education teams to review the central elements of the plan, provide access to national experts and consultants, and guide districts in designing plans for local implementation.

During the grant period, the state organized a Literacy Leadership Network, drawing from members of the literacy planning task force and including the literacy liaison designated by the principal to broker support from the state in every New Hampshire school. The network members orchestrated an array of dissemination strategies such as developing print and online resources and conducting forums and presentations for districts and schools, institutions of higher education, superintendents, curriculum directors, Title I project managers, teacher groups, and principals.

A second statewide summit was held in January 2008, hosting 300 educators to learn about data teams, personalized planning, and student support programs from each other.

West Virginia launched the *Teach 21* website, a repository for aligned literacy and content resources and guidance on creating a professional community for leading school-wide literacy plans.²⁶ The site provides a broad compendium of resources such as instructional guidelines, strategy banks, power standards, and assessments. In addition, the state has hosted a series of webinars for educators throughout the state on a range of topics, including the AIM for Literacy model, literacy team basics, strengthening the core program, vocabulary development, and implementation at the high school level.

Utah has worked to align state achievement standards, curricula, and assessment practices by integrating learning skills into content areas. The state has provided forums and technical assistance to help districts design literacy plans based on the state's draft standards for secondary language arts and the state's 3-Tier Model of Reading Instruction.²⁷ In addition, the state has provided districts with resources and technical assistance for their designs by establishing model sites, holding state-wide forums for district teams on the design and implementation of literacy plans, and partnering with higher education and regional service agencies to provide technical assistance and build capacity for local implementation. In the fall of 2007, more than 200 people attended the Utah State Office of Education's summit, "Taking Action on Adolescent Literacy."²⁸ The meeting provided training on the five action steps driving the state's new leadership model for improving adolescent literacy: a) developing an effective literacy action plan, b) supporting teachers, c) using data, d) building capacity, and e) allocating resources.

Kentucky has proposed creating a state literacy office, which would coordinate efforts and marshal needed resources to support effective literacy instruction; provide endorsements, certifications, and incentives to increase the number of literacy coaches and reading specialists serving secondary schools; and use current programs to provide liter-

acy coaching support on a regional level. Among other efforts to boost the quantity and quality of reading instruction, KDE now provides tuition and loan forgiveness to recruit English language arts teachers and reading specialists as a high need area; offers a Kentucky Reading/Writing Endorsement to coaches trained in the Striving Readers program; and colleges and universities expect to strengthen literacy coursework and experiences in alignment with International Reading Association standards incorporated into the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education program requirements. Finally, KDE has requested that as part of its legislative agenda, the Kentucky Board of Education make funding and incentives for reading specialists and coaches a priority.

5. Creating policy structures and supports to drive local implementation of district and school literacy plans.

Another focus of NASBE's project was the key role of the state in establishing systems and policies to help districts and schools improve content-based literacy instruction at the classroom level. Studies show that a positive school environment—characterized by robust communication networks both internally and externally, supportive school leadership, and access to structured opportunities for professional collaboration—is essential to improving literacy instruction. But such environments do not occur often enough, so they must be actively promoted at the state and district levels through multiple strategies and strong instructional leadership. States need to combine pressure and support through school improvement policies and professional development structures to advance all levels of the system. To this end, NASBE worked with states to exercise key policy levers to ensure that educators have the necessary training, preparation, and supports to provide literacy instruction, including:

- Establishing core requirements and fully articulating literacy standards that embed literacy instruction within content area learning;
- Implementing school-wide literacy initiatives that include content area literacy and a continuum of supports for all students;

- Providing resources, incentives, and guidance to ensure that districts and schools offer ongoing, embedded professional development and school-based supports to integrate literacy strategies within content areas; and
- Crafting policies to develop principals, teacher leaders, and specialists as part of a professional learning community that has the organizational and instructional supports to implement literacy instruction and provide more intensive supports for struggling readers.

For example, as part of Utah’s effort, the state’s Curriculum and Instruction Division worked with local content-area experts, district leaders, and national consultants to examine the Utah Core Curriculum and incorporate literacy learning skills into subject area domains. In follow-up interviews with project staff, the state coordinator emphasized the need to incorporate literacy strands within content standards to promote collective accountability for adolescents’ performance in content-area reading and writing. The regulatory document is currently in draft form under review and revision.

Second, the state established two language arts reading endorsements at the basic and advanced levels in order to create an infrastructure of instructional supports for implementing school-wide literacy instruction. The state education department developed a course framework for these endorsements that focuses on curriculum-based measurement and the assessment/instructional cycle, using assessment data to design and implement instructional interventions to increase students’ reading achievement, deploying instructional strategies to address

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students’ reading strengths and needs, and monitoring students’ progress to ensure they are making optimal progress in reading.

West Virginia recently adopted new content standards that embed literacy performance skills as part of the *West Virginia Content Standards and Objectives for 21st Century Learning*, along with changing district policies regarding time allotment for literacy instruction and adopting new content standards.²⁹ In New Hampshire, the Council for Teacher Education, responsible for higher education program approval, the Professional Standards Board, and the New Hampshire State Board of Education formally adopted new teacher certification standards for English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies for elementary, middle, and high school teachers. All of the new teacher standards identify the requisite teaching competencies to provide literacy instruction in relation to the specific discipline.

Beginning in 2008-2009, the Connecticut Department of Education began revising certification regulations for core content areas that will apply to course requirements within teacher preparation programs. Content revisions address both the subject matter and the methods of teaching that have been adapted to address reading and writing performance requirements. English language arts changes have already been approved; mathematics, science, and social studies are in draft form, with only social studies needing to go before the state board for approval.

In addition, the Connecticut State Board of Education is considering regulation changes to teacher certification through July 2009 to address one of its overarching goals of the *Five Year Comprehensive Plan for Education*—“all students must have access to a rigorous curriculum taught by highly effective and qualified educators who believe that every student at every grade level can achieve at high levels.”³⁰ The proposed changes are designed to strengthen the training teachers receive to provide instruction and academic interventions to students with diverse needs including students with disabilities, struggling learners, and gifted and talented students. The state’s teacher preparation programs would be

required to ensure that new teacher candidates have competencies such as using evidence-based principles of instruction to meet the needs of students with diverse learning needs; providing interventions to students who don't respond to primary instruction alone; selecting and interpreting data from a variety of assessments to document student's growth, inform planning, and instruction; and determining where targeted assistance to struggling students should be directed.

Kentucky introduced literacy planning at the local level by linking school-wide initiatives to existing planning frameworks such as the state's Program Effectiveness Review for Kentucky Schools (PERKS) initiative. The Literacy PERKS was recently revised to help schools review literacy instruction and interventions and to formulate school-wide literacy plans. Nine areas are reviewed: aligned curriculum, multiple assessments, instruction and targeted intervention, literate environment, partnerships (family, school, and community), professional development, literacy team, valuable resources, and literacy plan. Following the revision, schools in federal and state grant programs have begun using the review indicators to assess school culture for leading literacy initiatives.

KDE plans broader implementation by training regional specialists to work with schools in conducting the Literacy PERKS review and by disseminating resources to all K-12 schools and universities.³¹ The Collaborative Center for Literacy Development, housed at the University of Kentucky's College of Education, has also developed an adolescent literacy toolkit that contains staff development lessons, position statements, interventions and instructional design, linking research and practice, improving classroom practice, school-wide resources, 21st century skills, and resources for principals. To further mobilize local literacy planning, KDE required applicants for a dropout prevention grant to address literacy planning; the state also intends to include requirements for school literacy plans when it presents the state's recommendations to the legislature in December 2009.

In fall 2008, the Kentucky Reading Association, in partnership with KDE, conducted a survey of edu-

cation policymakers and leaders in reading instruction to gauge current perceptions about adolescent literacy in the state. Despite widespread investments in literacy initiatives, more than 90 percent of survey respondents said grade 4-12 teachers did not enter the profession well-prepared to develop reading or writing skills in all subject areas. In addition, a large majority of respondents said there was inadequate or insufficient professional development, instructional materials, reading specialists, and administrator preparedness to support implementation of ambitious literacy plans and strategies. Perhaps most alarming was that 94 percent of respondents said that adolescents do not graduate from high school ready for the literacy challenges of college and the workplace.

The survey responses made it clear that much work remains to ensure that high-quality literacy teachers reach all Kentucky classrooms. The report on the state's grant acknowledges that addressing teacher preparation is a formidable challenge. As a result, Kentucky created a comprehensive plan to take specific action throughout 2009-2010 to improve teacher preparation, licensure, and professional development.

Elements include changing policies and structures to enhance teacher development by requiring universities to develop teacher competencies to ensure that all teachers can incorporate literacy across content areas; promoting district and university partnerships to strengthen content literacy instructional models and provide real-world applications; and implementing ongoing, job-embedded professional development opportunities in literacy specific to schools' needs.

The state also established grants to create partnerships among secondary school staffs, faculty at universities, and regional education cooperatives with the goal of increasing the competencies of educators and university faculty in practicing and implementing content-based literacy strategies. Kentucky's project director for the NASBE grant states, "Given the independent operating of each college and university, this will be one of our biggest and most difficult tasks; however, we have committed individuals and partners to take on this task."

Summary and Recommendations

The Network states took major steps in developing literacy plans and executing their broad dissemination and implementation. They focused on integrating literacy with a wide range of reform and improvement measures, including secondary school redesign, school improvement and accreditation policies, support for content area learning, special education programs and services, and teacher and leader development. Working with policy leaders, agency staff, practitioners, higher education, districts, and schools, the Network states:

- developed signature literacy plans;
- provided guidance, training, and tools to strengthen educator knowledge and skills in delivering content-specific literacy instruction; and
- created the infrastructure and supports to provide a continuum of interventions for struggling readers.

NASBE has learned a great deal from the work of the Network states to advance adolescent literacy. In particular, it is clear that the pervasive low level of adolescent literacy throughout the nation is not a problem that can be solved in isolation with some extra tutoring or supplementary programs for those unable to read well. On the contrary, changing instructional practice—particularly within secondary content-area classes—is extremely hard work. It takes a concerted statewide policy and school improvement effort to reach deep into districts to impact the instructional practices of teachers across the curriculum. Some of the major findings from NASBE’s evaluation of the Network states’ achievements during the 18-month grant period are described below, as grouped under the key areas of work.

1. Developing a collaborative process to create the state’s comprehensive literacy plan

State leaders worked closely with broad coalitions to fashion a literacy plan that articulates the research, core principles, and system elements

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essential to driving improvements in adolescent literacy. To gain traction in framing a viable system-wide approach, states coordinated actions among political entities, including state boards of education, legislators, and state commissioners and their deputies, as well as with external partners such as teacher educators, service centers, districts, and schools. The Network states that garnered broad support through collaborative and consensus-building processes made considerable progress in integrating literacy as part of school improvement efforts.

2. Building coordination within the state education agency

States reported that literacy improvement efforts received more strategic attention and greater traction if positioned within large reform frameworks such as secondary school redesign for college/career readiness (e.g., Partnership for 21st Century Skills), teacher and school leader training, and special education/Title I Response to Intervention programs. Much has been written about the need to reorganize state agencies to increase the level of coherence in regulation and program administration. Efforts to advance literacy have too often been made at the margins through a disparate collection of programs. States need to coordinate efforts across departments and programs, creating a common language and shared focus on what constitutes the “right work” of improving teaching and learning. As a recent report from The Education Alliance at Brown University points out, “no single level of the system can adequately develop the solutions needed to bring improvement efforts to scale. In spite of good intentions and good ideas, solutions enacted independently and without systemic

purpose may result in an incoherent application of strategies and use of resources.”³²

The Network states that opted to embed literacy instruction as part of broader initiatives were able to design multiple approaches for scaling up and sustaining school-wide literacy improvements. States reported that their efforts to improve effective literacy instruction and support were much more likely to hold if there was a simultaneous change of how work was coordinated across divisions to share human and financial resources, maximize efficiencies, and provide more coherent, consistent responses to districts and schools. They strengthened statewide implementation by focusing specifically on raising instructional quality and improving teachers’ ability to deliver effective content-area literacy instruction. Furthermore, rather than simply adding a new program to the complex set of mandates and initiatives facing districts and schools, these states set in motion systemic changes in instructional practices and training that received broad support from teachers and leaders well beyond the life of the grant.

3. Providing grant support and technical assistance to state boards of education

Given the complexity of making real improvements in adolescent literacy, state policymakers need assistance and support to become more engaged in developing and overseeing policies that address the reading needs of students along the entire K-12 continuum. In the project states, the role of the state board of education was critical to how well the grant activities led to a comprehensive policy approach. State boards have ultimate authority over the long-term goals, vision, and strategic mission of the department of education. They can call upon key constituencies to act, given their broad authority over teacher preparation programs, school districts, professional development providers, and regional educational agencies. Through their final approval of policies, budgets, and priorities, state boards are able to allocate resources, deploy staff, and garner public attention on the pressing issue of low adolescent literacy levels.

Project staff guided states in the use of regulations and incentives to ensure continuous improvement of classroom instruction—improvements that are imbued with the latest research on effective content-based reading and writing instruction. States were asked to target the important policy levers to make the linkages between regulation and effective practice transparent and consistent. When board-level commitment and engagement in the ongoing grant work was present, the state succeeded in revising content standards and district policies and strengthening teacher and leader development—all of which must be strategically interrelated to scale up and sustain improvements in literacy.

4. Advancing foundational work in districts and schools

Scaling up instructional improvements requires considerable effort to get buy-in at the district and school level. The Network states acted strategically to engage stakeholders, test potential strategies, examine their impact and viability, and articulate a policy agenda to create long-term solutions to improve adolescent literacy. The intent was to develop capacity-building strategies for schools that would cover such areas as: infusing reading and writing instruction throughout the curriculum; identifying struggling readers; differentiating instruction and monitoring student progress; and creating a school-wide professional learning culture.

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***How Can State Education Agencies Support District Improvement?
The Education Alliance***

To ensure that the capacity-building strategies were effective, states were careful to evaluate the input from first-time implementers to refine supports, training, and guidance and to consider the need for further policy changes to attain long-term goals. Some of the lessons gleaned from these first pilot efforts to implement local literacy initiatives include:

- Adoption of tiered models takes a two- to four-year period for staff to plan, implement, and sustain a school-wide initiative;
- Implementation efforts must be driven locally through the use of tools for schools to self-assess their readiness and capacity to sustain school-wide literacy plans, along with networks of highly trained content/literacy specialists that can provide frequent training and technical assistance;
- Districts and schools must try to innovate and break out of scheduling and time constraints to provide training for educators and coordinated instruction to students with sufficient opportunities to practice literacy skills and strategies across the curriculum;
- Communication strategies must be crafted to connect adolescent literacy with other state initiatives so it is not perceived as an add-on, but rather as central to broad improvement initiatives;
- The roles and responsibilities of all educators must be clarified in reinforcing a set of core literacy strategies in all content areas;
- Technical assistance, professional development, and resources must be targeted to improving adolescent literacy (as opposed to early reading) and provided by adolescent literacy and content area specialists;
- There is a need for a common language and framework in order to successfully scale up improvements and help integrate distinct initiatives from the state level to the district and school level;

- Teachers and leaders must be engaged at all points in designing and implementing a statewide literacy initiative, including the essential elements such as standards, curricula, assessments, ongoing professional development, and resources; and
- The state should craft policy structures to compliment the use of state-approved training modules (e.g., incorporate as part of school improvement planning, educator evaluation systems, criteria for advancing to professional licensure, inclusion in Master's-level endorsement programs).

5. Improving teacher preparation and professional development programs

All of the Network states developed strategies to improve teacher competencies in providing literacy instruction, with particular attention to strengthening content-specific literacy. The guidance NASBE provided to grantees outlined recommendations related to investing in teachers to ensure they have the preparation, professional development, and supports to provide effective, content-based literacy instruction. The Network states designed pilot instructional models that incorporated intensive professional development for practicing teachers and for preservice candidates receiving formal preparation in universities. Higher education faculty have also played an important role in developing state literacy plans and have continued to assist in building capacity for their local implementation.

Overall, the Network states succeeded on three fronts: first, in revising student content standards to include the demonstration of content-specific reading and writing; second, in creating partnerships between universities and districts to provide school-based professional development and coaching; and third, in articulating the important role of higher education in strengthening the knowledge and skills of educators to provide content-based literacy instruction.

Moving Forward

While the Network states had major successes in creating an infrastructure to train and support practicing teachers as part of a school-wide initiative, much remains to be done to scale up and sustain changes in instructional practice. The Network states have set in motion changes to teacher preparation by revising content standards for students, integrating literacy in school improvement policies and initiatives, and developing partnerships between universities and districts to provide on-site training. Even after the grant period, a number of the Network states are continuing to work with their policy leaders to chart a course to strengthen the state's teacher development system.

Despite these successes, bridging the divide between research and practice continues to be a formidable challenge, even as the press for schools to prepare students to compete internationally increases. States are asking schools and their teaching staff to shoulder the burden for educating all students to the highest levels in history even as the student body has changed economically, culturally, linguistically, and academically. The fact that all students are expected to achieve these outcomes means that the large number of students who drop out or who do not have the ability to read complex subject area texts or write well-constructed essays can no longer be tolerated. Of late, what has been called into question are the structures and systems that states put into place that impact school quality—and in particular, what gets taught, how well, and by whom.

In this context, states exercise jurisdiction over two very important systems—the institutions for training educators and the accountability and assessment systems that measure school performance. In the case of teacher preparation, states play an important role in teacher development by setting standards for the profession, determining initial and advanced licensure, and accrediting teacher preparation programs. Yet, teacher education institutions that bestow teaching credentials have been roundly criticized for years. In 2006, Arthur Levine, former president of Columbia University, led a study of the

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preparation of teachers in education schools and reports that, “The inescapable conclusion is that the nation’s teacher education programs are not adequately preparing their students in competencies that principals say they need and that schools of education regard as their responsibility to teach...The challenge facing education schools is not to do a better job at what they are already doing, but to do a fundamentally different job.”³³

Levine recommends that teacher preparation programs must be transformed into professional schools where the focus is on classroom practice and student learning and where achievement becomes the primary measure of teacher preparation success (using data systems to assess and improve the performance of education schools by providing information on the performance of the teachers and principals who were prepared at the institution). He calls for a strong state role in establishing effective mechanisms for teacher education quality control.

These recommendations are consistent with NASBE’s recommendations from *Reading at Risk* on the need to strengthen teacher preparation and training to ensure teachers have knowledge and skills to deliver strong, content-based literacy instruction. Programs must focus on integrating content with performance skills and cultivate teaching practices that improve student learning and performance (e.g., thinking, speaking, reading, and writing). Teacher education programs must serve as professional schools that require coherent, rigorous curricula; connect theory and practice; provide school-based field and clinical experiences; and use performance measures to

evaluate candidates, determine program completion, and grant licensure. States must foster university and district partnerships to redesign teacher preparation and professional development to improve content area literacy instruction by grounding preparation in actual school settings and as part of a community of practice; merging expertise within the colleges and among school, district, and university staff; and providing strong clinical components.

Another area that states must rethink is the design of accountability and assessment systems that drive what students learn and how teachers teach. National discussions are focusing on creating higher, clearer standards and generating lower-stakes, performance measures that can serve to inform classroom practice. The rationale is to focus on the application of knowledge rather than mere coverage of discrete facts largely measured by using multiple-choice assessments. Studies show that high-achieving nations—based on international assessments such as the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)*, the *Program in International Student Assessment (PISA)*, and *Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)*—explicitly create standards, curriculum guidance and assessments that focus on 21st century skills such as the ability to find and organize information, communicate well in multiple formats, analyze and synthesize information, and self-monitor one’s understanding.³⁴

Throughout 2009, NASBE is undertaking an extensive examination of assessment systems for the 21st century learner that is focusing on the nature of assessments, the connection to quality teaching, and the redesign of central systems such as teacher development and accountability to ensure students are prepared for college and the workplace. Our deliberations and recommendations will be used to inform future efforts to work with state boards of education on building state capacity to advance adolescent literacy.

“The inescapable conclusion is that the nation’s teacher education programs are not adequately preparing their students in competencies that principals say they need and that schools of education regard as their responsibility to teach...The challenge facing education schools is not to do a better job at what they are already doing, but to do a fundamentally different job.”

*Educating School Teachers,
Arthur Levine*

Conclusion

The NASBE project galvanized state action to build a knowledge base about the research and issues related to adolescent literacy development, leading to the creation of policies to support statewide adolescent literacy achievement. The Network states have made broad commitments to continuing this work to transform classroom practice for older students to ensure strong instruction and supports for struggling readers and for integrating literacy as part of subject area learning. As Cindy Parker, the lead for the Kentucky grant, writes, “Receiving the grant allowed us to have a focus for our work and a support system to create a sense of urgency for adolescent literacy, but the impact of the plan will continue for many years to come. Raising awareness of the unique learning needs of adolescents, enacting change from teacher preparation programs to in-service teacher practices to meet students’ needs is no small or short-term task. We hope our state can become a model to others as we all work to achieve a common goal for all our students and their teachers and administrators.”

Appendix A. Profiles of Network States' Efforts in Improving Adolescent Literacy

Connecticut



Connecticut's work was guided by three strategies focused on building the capacity of teachers to provide research-based literacy instruction within subject areas:

- 1) design, implement, and evaluate a cost-effective, replicable pilot instructional model focused on providing students and practicing teachers with specific skills related to effective content area literacy instruction;
- 2) analyze the results of the evaluations of the pilot program in order to develop a flexible, low-cost instructional model for preservice teachers to be implemented at higher education institutions throughout the state and for practicing teachers as a professional development opportunity for districts in need; and
- 3) utilize lessons learned from the pilot program to begin developing policy around adolescent literacy and preservice programs for grades 4-12.

Adopting a State Literacy Plan

Connecticut couched literacy within a larger reform strategy. In 2007, Connecticut published a comprehensive literacy plan, *Beyond the Blueprint: Literacy in Grades 4-12 and Across the Content Areas*, which dovetailed with the state's new overarching strategic education goals (see www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&Q=321834 and www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/commish/comp_plan06-11.pdf). As outlined in its *Five-year Comprehensive Plan for Education—2006-2011*, Connecticut's major educational objectives centered on preparing all students for

"lifelong learning and careers in a competitive, global economy" through "a rigorous literacy-based curriculum linked to authentic, real-life experiences."

Beyond the Blueprint provides detailed information about what constitutes comprehensive literacy instruction models, strategies that facilitate learning across content areas, and the infrastructure needed to support best practices in literacy instruction. Along with revising frameworks for English language arts, science, mathematics, and social studies, the state recognized the need to lay the groundwork for local implementation. Throughout 2007, the education department's Bureau of Curriculum and Instruction crafted outreach strategies to broadly disseminate *Beyond the Blueprint*. Bureau staff developed presentation materials and worked with a range of professional associations and regional service centers to provide professional literacy information to district and school administrators.

As the state moved forward to implement the literacy plan in districts and schools, Connecticut recognized the need to attend to the literacy competencies that teachers need to advance the literacy development of older students, and called on school leaders and teacher educators to share in the responsibility for providing teachers with the requisite training and supports. As stated in *Beyond the Blueprint*, "all teachers are key to the day-to-day movement of each student toward the ultimate goal of becoming a skilled, independent, lifelong reader and writer." To ensure that all content area and English language arts teachers are well versed in the reading requirements of their particular special-

ty, Connecticut set about framing a scalable model for training teachers to impact student learning in middle and high schools.

Emphasizing Teacher Development

In 2007, the state received funding through NASBE's State Adolescent Literacy Network to improve teaching capacity through a collaborative effort between the State Board of Education, Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU), and Naugatuck Public Schools (NPS). Recognizing that standards-based reforms will fail if they do not significantly improve the quality of classroom instruction throughout all grades and content areas, Connecticut focused on scaling high-quality performance of educators at every level in the system.

Ultimately, more than 20 state, university, and district literacy experts joined together to design a flexible model to shape 1) higher education preservice teacher programs, 2) research-based literacy across content area instruction offered to preservice and practicing teachers; and 3) low-cost, literacy-based instructional support for school districts. The lead collaborators designed action plans, formative assessments, rubrics for implementing strategies that adhered to the research base on literacy instruction, defined content area literacy instruction, and provided strong clinical components to preservice teachers.

Year-long Flexible Training Pilot Program

Connecticut then conducted a one-year pilot of a flexible training model designed to shape preservice programs and serve as a low-cost, literacy-based instructional support for school districts. One component included SCSU and NPS working with the CSDE middle and high school literacy consultant to conduct four all-day interactive workshops for both NPS teachers and administrators and SCSU professors and students. The workshops, held between September and April, focused on research-based cross-content comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, writing, motivation, and literacy formative assessment. The lead staff created presentations and materials that aligned with *Beyond the Blueprint* and with NPS district curricula and policies. Following each workshop, NPS teachers and SCSU preservice teachers applied the literacy strategies within the teachers'

respective content areas. After the February workshop on formative assessment, NPS teachers and SCSU students developed pre- and post-content-specific assessments based on the open-ended response of the Connecticut Mastery Test, as well as a content literacy assessment rubric for evaluating the assessments. These assessments were then administered to NPS students in February and March.

Running concurrently with the professional development sessions, the 11 participating SCSU preservice teachers attended a semester-long "literacy across the content areas" course at SCSU, which required SCSU students to complete 40 hours of fieldwork. Five students in the first semester and six students in the second semester provided instructional support to NPS teachers for a minimum of 90 minutes, two times a week. Students were matched with one NPS teacher in the area of English, mathematics, science, or social studies. Four teachers were involved, along with four other content teachers who served as the comparison group for the pilot evaluation. The student teachers were required to develop action plans to implement literacy strategies in each subject area and document instructional activities (e.g., log of strategies for before, during, and after reading for whole group; pairing or grouping of students to activate prior knowledge; use of anticipation guides; and vocabulary and fluency development).

NPS data from each content area was collected on both the program implementation and the impact on student learning. The compiled data included observations by SCSU professors and NPS administrators, action plans, student work, and a set of assessments developed by project participants for the preservice teachers, NPS educators, and NPS students involved with the pilot. Pilot project staff held follow-up work sessions to review the application of literacy strategies within subject areas, provided feedback to teachers, and reviewed which reading and writing strategies were most effective for distinct content domains. These sessions offered opportunities for reflective teaching and provided feedback on how to improve the overall design of coursework and field experiences for participants.

Analyzing the Pilot

The assessments for the pilot included a number of qualitative and quantitative measures administered

over the course of the year to assess changes in teaching practice, students' use of literacy strategies within content areas, feedback on the training model for NPS teachers and SCSU students, and student achievement on measures of literacy performance. Qualitative assessments were administered to the NPS teachers and students and SCSU students. Formative and summative assessments were administered to the NPS students who were a part of the grant, as well as to the control group. Overall, assessment data showed substantial increases in content-relevant reading and writing throughout the subject areas and improvements in students' literacy performance over a no-pilot control group. (See graph below.)

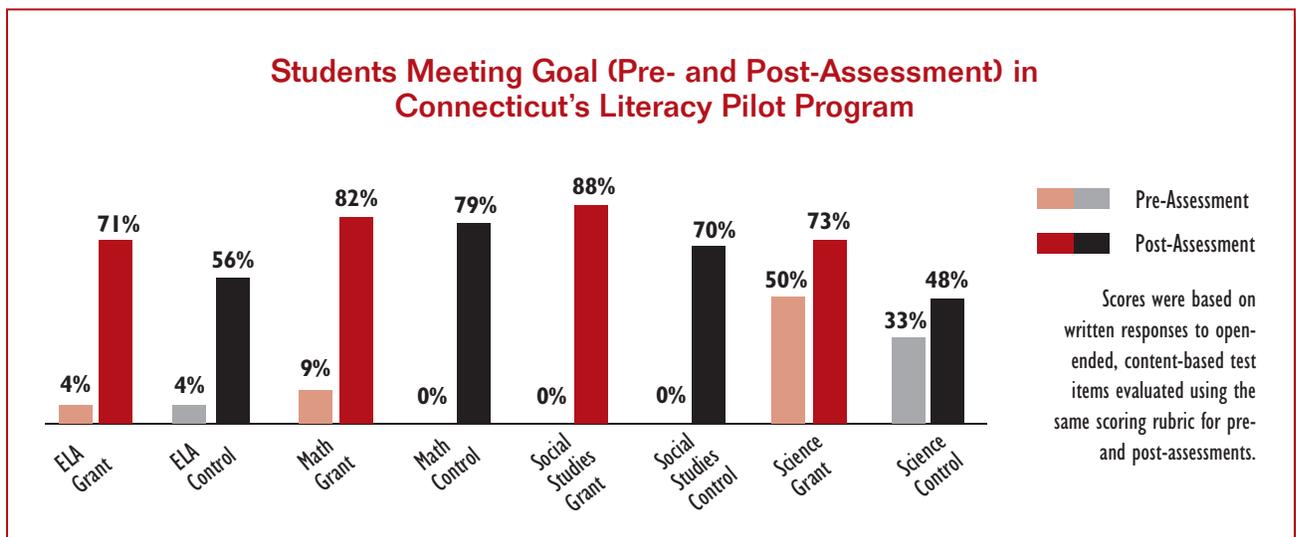
Survey responses from NPS teachers and students and SCSU students provided additional information. The post-experience survey of SCSU students indicated that participants had not observed the instructional methods used in the pilot by the NPS teachers in previous fieldwork assignments. In contrast, they reported that it was "the most valuable of any fieldwork experience and strongly recommended that the fieldwork model be uniformly adopted in all SCSU classes."

Preservice student responses indicated a strong sense of professionalism, high regard for mentor-teacher relationships, and increased knowledge of instructional methods for teaching content literacy. Students indicated that they achieved a deeper meaning of reading as a result of being able to design, implement, and assess authentic learning

experiences. One key aspect of the pilot that was singled out was the joint work between students, teachers, and administrators that addressed the content area curricula rather than typically unrelated lessons designed in methods classes. SCSU preservice teachers wanted more time to work with the NPS teachers and students and recommended that the fieldwork extend for two consecutive semesters. "Prospective teachers should be included in planning and assessment of the curriculum and not just as observers," said one pair of student responses on the SCSU post-survey. Another student added, "Observing, working one on one, working in small groups, and occasionally teaching the whole class... allowed me to become more comfortable with the class and feel more confident."

The pre- and post-survey of NPS teachers only showed a moderate change in their teaching behavior as related to applied literacy strategies. The teachers indicated on the pre-assessment that they already had experiences with the integration of literacy strategies into content area instruction. Teacher responses cited benefits to students including "a sense of excitement," "confidence to tackle new situations," and "ability to apply what was learned in other content areas." They also noted the value of the grant activities to their own community of practice: "There is now an overwhelming awareness of what is expected in the area of adolescent literacy," one respondent said.

NPS students reported that the pilot project improved their reading and writing abilities across con-



tent areas, as well as their motivation for learning. Student responses included, “It helps me practice fluency in a fun, creative way” and “These strategies have helped me as a student because they improved my understanding [about] what I’m reading.”

Qualitative and quantitative measures indicated a significant increase in the amount of content-relevant reading and writing throughout each of the subject areas. Based on the preliminary findings, the board and agency staff committed to infusing literacy instruction across all content areas in middle and high schools and strengthening literacy coursework and clinical experiences within teacher preservice programs.

Utilizing Lessons Learned from Pilots to Create Policy Structures

A major goal of the NASBE grant focused on the design of policies and/or sustainable structures to scale and sustain literacy improvements. The grant encouraged states to craft comprehensive state literacy initiatives that are implemented within the context of core academic subjects and as part of the states’ school improvement initiatives. To that end, a key objective of Connecticut’s action plan focused on utilizing the lessons learned from the pilot to craft policy around adolescent literacy and preservice programs for grades 4-12.

In July 2008, the lead project staff presented a final report on the background, results, and data of the pilot program to the state board of education, the commissioner of higher education, and members of the PK-16 Council. The presentation highlighted recommendations to scale up and sustain efforts to advance literacy improvements in Connecticut. The final report emphasizes that the model was effective in improving literacy instruction and student performance in middle and high schools and that it offers a flexible way to shape higher education preparation programs and professional development within schools and districts. The report provides detailed information about the successes and failures of the grant work, instructional strategies, assessment feedback, and student work. The overall impact of the project was positive, the report says, and needs to be continued through actions by the state board and department of education.

The Connecticut State Board of Education’s recommendations specified action in changing certification regulations to require a minimum of one content-based literacy course for those receiving 7-12 and K-12 certification. Further action would include working with higher education institutions to develop preservice teacher programs that include at least one full-year course focused on literacy (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) embedded in students’ specialized content areas, as well as fieldwork where preservice teachers are given classroom leadership opportunities to implement literacy strategies in middle or high school classrooms. Content revisions should address both the subject matter and the methods of teaching that have been adapted to address reading and writing performance requirements.

As a result, in 2008-09 the Connecticut Department of Education began revising certification regulations for core content areas that will apply to course requirements within teacher preparation programs. Content revisions address both the subject matter and the methods of teaching that have been adapted to address reading and writing performance requirements. English language arts changes have already been approved; mathematics, science, and social studies are in draft form, with only social studies needing to go before the state board for approval.

In addition, the state board of education is considering regulation changes to teacher certification through July 2009 to address one of its overarching goals in the *Five-year Comprehensive Plan for Education*: “All students must have access to a rigorous curriculum taught by highly effective and qualified educators who believe that every student at every grade level can achieve at high levels.” The proposed changes are designed to strengthen the training teachers receive to provide instruction and academic interventions to students with diverse learning needs. The state’s teacher preparation programs would be required to ensure that new teacher candidates have competencies such as ability to use evidence-based principles of instruction to meet the needs of students with diverse learning needs; provide interventions to students who don’t respond to primary instruction alone; select and interpret data from a variety of assessments to document student’s growth, inform planning, and instruction; and determine where targeted assistance to struggling students should be directed.

Kentucky



In 2007, the Kentucky Board of Education received funding through NASBE's State Adolescent Literacy Network to frame the state's role in advancing adolescent literacy. Recognizing the increased literacy demands placed on young people to succeed in college or the workplace, the Kentucky board chose to focus on literacy at the adolescent level (grades 6-12) as a top priority. We will "ensure high levels of student achievement," the board stated in its 2007-08 Strategic Work Priorities, "through an increasing focus on critical thinking skills across the curriculum; elementary, middle, and high school mathematics; funding to systematically address adolescent literacy; and ensuring the delivery of targeted instructional interventions."

Under the board's auspices, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) adopted the following core strategies to improve literacy instruction and performance: 1) establish an Adolescent Literacy Taskforce charged with developing a statewide Adolescent Literacy Plan and develop a position statement for stakeholder groups, as well as a compilation of resources and model programs to build knowledge and create interest in advocating for change; 2) enhance teacher preparation and certification by requiring courses in literacy; create a literacy coach/teacher leader endorsement; and design and implement professional development opportunities for schools based on existing programs and models; and 3) provide state-level guidance and training for schools to develop comprehensive literacy plans.

Adolescent Literacy Task Force

The centerpiece of the state's workplan was the establishment of the Adolescent Literacy Task Force, directed by KDE and charged with developing a state literacy plan. The Task Force, which includes two state board members and a broad group of diverse stakeholders, forged a set of recommendations that built on lessons learned from locally implemented literacy initiatives, such as the state's Striving Readers Program, Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project, and professional development initiatives (see textbox on page 14).

Kentucky state leaders recognized the need to integrate improvement initiatives and to articulate a coherent vision that places literacy improvements at the core of the state's overarching reform efforts. A great deal of effort was devoted to garnering public and political support; securing buy-in to the need for extensive professional development statewide, and to working across divisions within KDE.

On the legislative front, several statutes and regulations exist that relate to preparing students for literacy success. The state's Program of Studies and Academic Expectations establish goals and codify minimum content standards. These statutes call for individual programs such as the Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project and require intervention strategies for accelerated learning for students who score below benchmark level in grades 8, 10, and 11. Yet to date, no one policy structure links the disparate elements and programs.

To articulate a framework for literacy improvements, the Kentucky legislature passed a Joint Resolution on Adolescent Literacy in the 2008 session that supports the department of education's efforts to "develop a cohesive and comprehensive statewide literacy plan that builds instructional and leadership capacity, sustains continuous improvements in literacy especially adolescent literacy, and identifies policies and practices to improve the literacy of the Commonwealth's children." The KDE plan and its initial recommendations were submitted to the Kentucky State Board of Education in 2008 and will be submitted to the Interim Joint Legislative Committee on Education by December 1, 2009.

Considerations for Kentucky's Adolescent Literacy Plan

In concert with the primary goals of the NASBE grant, KDE staff and partners analyzed national and state data, research, recommendations from national organizations, lessons learned from existing literacy initiatives, and programs that address accelerated learning associated with college readiness standards.

Beginning in September 2007, the state convened representatives from K-12, higher education, and business to present ideas related to the NASBE

grant goals. The feedback and input served as the basis for key elements of the state's proposed literacy plan described below.

Developing Capacity from State to Local Level

Kentucky embraced the goal of promoting literacy plans at the district or school level, while at the same time recognizing the need to build a state infrastructure to ensure successful local implementation. The state proposed to create a state literacy office to coordinate efforts and marshal needed resources to support effective literacy instruction; expand the pool of literacy coaches and reading specialists by providing endorsements, certifications, and incentives to increase the numbers serving secondary schools; and use current structures (e.g., Reading First, Highly Skilled Educator programs, Writing Cluster Leaders) to provide literacy coaching support on a regional level.

Kentucky has made considerable progress in expanding the network of literacy experts and bolstering the policy structures to sustain enhancements in preparation and training programs. KDE now provides tuition and loan forgiveness to recruit to high need areas such as English language arts teachers and reading specialists; coaches trained in the Striving Readers program receive a Kentucky Reading/Writing Endorsement; and colleges and universities are expected to strengthen literacy coursework and experiences in alignment with International Reading Association standards incorporated into the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education program requirements. Finally, KDE has requested that the Kentucky Board of Education make funding and incentives for reading specialists and coaches a priority in its legislative agenda.

Kentucky is working with higher education to redesign preparation programs for principals and create a new Master's level program for teacher leaders. Universities and colleges must submit their redesign plans for approval by the Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board in spring 2009. The Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB) gave final approval to launch the first program in the state at Asbury College to receive approval to prepare "teachers as leaders."

This new program in "Teacher as Leader" qualifies credentialed teachers to complete requirements for a Master of Arts in Education degree in developing skills to serve as leaders for today's schools striving for excellence. Building off the lessons learned from the Adolescent Literacy Coaching Project and the Striving Readers Program, KDE is creating a literacy leadership module for the principal component and another for the teacher leadership endorsement for delivery in 2009.

In addition, Kentucky is introducing literacy planning at the local level by linking school-wide initiatives to existing planning frameworks such as Kentucky's Program Effectiveness Review for Kentucky Schools (PERKS) program. The Literacy PERKS was recently revised to help schools review literacy instruction and interventions and to formulate school-wide literacy plans. The nine areas reviewed under the Literacy PERKS include aligned curriculum, multiple assessments, instruction and targeted intervention, literate environment, partnerships (family, school, and community), professional development, literacy team, valuable resources, and literacy plan. Following the adaptation, schools in federal and state grant programs have begun using the PERKS indicators to assess school-wide literacy instruction.

KDE plans broader implementation by training regional specialists to work with schools in conducting Literacy PERKS reviews and by disseminating web-based and other resources, such as video clips, publications, CDs and DVDs. The Collaborative Center for Literacy Development, housed at the University of Kentucky's College of Education, has also developed an adolescent literacy toolkit that contains staff development lessons, position statements, interventions and instructional designs, and other resources for teachers and principals. (See *Literacy Without Limits* (DVD) at www.Literacywithoutlimits.org, which was sent to all K-12 schools and universities in the state.)

To further mobilize local literacy planning, KDE required applicants for a dropout prevention grant to address literacy planning. The state also intends to include requirements for school literacy plans when it presents the state's recommendations to the legislature in December 2009.

Increasing Teacher Competency in Literacy Instruction

Kentucky has focused on the state role in strengthening the capacity and knowledge of teachers to improve reading and writing across the curriculum. In fall 2008, the Kentucky Reading Association, in partnership with KDE, conducted a survey of education policymakers and leaders in reading instruction to gauge current perceptions about adolescent literacy in the state. Respondents were pessimistic about the current state of preparation and professional development of teachers in literacy instruction, and 94 percent said that adolescents do not graduate from high school ready for the literacy challenges of college and the workplace.

The survey responses made it clear that much work remains to ensure that high-quality literacy teachers reach all Kentucky classrooms. As a result, Kentucky created a comprehensive plan to take specific action throughout 2009-2010 to improve teacher preparation, licensure, and professional development. Elements include:

- changing policies and structures to enhance teacher preparation by requiring universities to develop teacher competencies that include the ability to incorporate literacy across content areas;
- promoting district and university partnerships to strengthen literacy instructional models across subjects and provide real-world applications in business, industry, and other career areas;
- and implementing ongoing, job-embedded professional development opportunities in literacy specific to schools' needs.

In line with these recommended actions, the state established the Kentucky Content Literacy grants to create partnerships among secondary school staffs, faculty at universities, and regional education cooperatives with the goal of increasing the competencies of educators and university faculty in practicing and implementing content-based literacy strategies. Despite the persistent challenges to redesigning teacher preparation, Kentucky has committed to strategic action over the next several years with the goal of improving educators' competencies in delivering high-quality literacy instruction and supports.

New Hampshire

New Hampshire focused on the following strategies to advance adolescent literacy statewide:

- 1) designing tactics to disseminate the New Hampshire literacy plan—the *Prek-16 Literacy Action Plan for the 21st Century*;
- 2) examining current state board policies that reference adolescent literacy and making recommendations for policy changes in order to ensure alignment with current research;
- 3) developing policy recommendations for the adoption of content area literacy standards in the certification process and in post-secondary preservice programs; and
- 4) building leadership and instructional capacity to support districts in the development and implementation of local literacy plans by creating a comprehensive professional development plan and working collaboratively with the state's Regional Professional Development Centers.

Literacy Action Plan

New Hampshire assembled a stakeholder task force with representatives from the state department of education, school districts, community and parent groups, and institutions of higher education to study the research on adolescent literacy and learning and develop guidance for parents, schools, districts, and preservice teacher education programs. Approved by the New Hampshire State Board of Education in 2007, the *Prek-16 Literacy Action Plan for the 21st Century* provides essential understandings about 21st century learning and outlines cross-cutting principles based on the research related to the reading process, the development of a proficient reader, and the essential components of effective school-wide literacy instruction for the 21st century (available online at www.ed.state.nh.us/Education/doe/organization/curriculum/School%20Improvement/literacy.htm).

The plan focuses on defining what is necessary to create and sustain a comprehensive literacy program and provides specific actions for schools,

districts, communities, and teacher preparation programs. It targets district and school leadership to lead a change process in order to seriously improve literacy in schools. The plan provides in-depth information about what constitutes comprehensive literacy instruction strategies, how these practices enhance learning across content areas, and the infrastructure needed to support best practices in literacy instruction. A number of areas receive detailed attention, including creating personalized instruction through assessment-driven tiered models of instruction, implementing a literacy action plan, building systems for data collection and analysis, and providing ongoing professional development to teachers on content-based literacy instruction.

With respect to this last area, the state emphasized the imperative to attend to the literacy competencies that teachers need to advance the literacy development of older students and called upon school leaders and teacher educators to share in the responsibility for providing teachers with the requisite training and supports. As stated in the *Literacy Action Plan*, “Without the necessary infrastructure, schools only see pockets of excellence in literacy instruction and anecdotal evidence of success.” The plan also addresses the critical role of higher education in:

- emphasizing the notion of “excellence in literacy” for all preservice teachers and in the professional development of teachers;
- ensuring that all education courses reflect “best practices” and “evidence-based research” in literacy so that literacy is included in all content areas; and
- establishing partnerships with local school districts in order to work collaboratively on literacy initiatives and action-based research projects.

Placing Literacy as the Linchpin of School Improvement

The state positioned literacy as a top priority and as part of broader initiatives such as high school redesign, personalizing instruction for diverse learners, preparing learners for a 21st century global economy, and supporting low-performing schools and districts. The New Hampshire state team reported that reading and writing are at the core of the work

“Without the necessary infrastructure, schools only see pockets of excellence in literacy instruction and anecdotal evidence of success.”

New Hampshire’s Prek-16 Literacy Action Plan for the 21st Century

of the P-16 Council (which includes the commissioner of education, the chair of the state board of education, the governor, the chancellor of the university system, and the head of the Business and Industry Association). These state leaders recognized the centrality of literacy in shaping systems of support to districts and provided political support in linking literacy improvements to the state’s accountability system. The broad framework outlined in the *Literacy Action Plan* provides the conceptual underpinnings for the state’s ambitious agenda to create state assessments, redesign high schools, and provide assistance to districts and schools in need of improvement. For example, the state is now proposing to rate the supports and programs provided to adolescent learners as part of the school and district accreditation system.

In addition, New Hampshire developed blueprints and training for schools to implement data-driven, tiered models of literacy instruction in collaboration with special education and Title I Response to Intervention models. These problem-solving methods share similar features with the tiered literacy models described in the *Literacy Action Plan*, such as using research-based practices, professional development, assessment, and progress monitoring to provide differentiated interventions and supports to struggling readers.

Creating an Infrastructure for Professional Learning

Throughout the grant period, New Hampshire devoted considerable resources to disseminating the *Literacy Action Plan* and providing a network

of supports to promote local implementation. With support and participation from the state's policy leaders (including the governor and state board of education members), the New Hampshire State Department of Education (NHDOE) held a Leadership Institute for 22 school districts and higher education teams to review the central elements of the plan, provide access to national experts and consultants, and guide districts in designing plans for local implementation.

After the Institute, the state mailed copies of the *Literacy Action Plan* to every school and district office in New Hampshire, including CDs and an extensive compendium of professional resources on adolescent literacy. Resources (in both English and Spanish) were also distributed to parents and caregivers. Each school was asked to designate a literacy contact to serve as the conduit for information from the state.

During the fall of 2007, the state organized a Literacy Leadership Network, drawing from members of the state literacy planning task force and including the school-based literacy liaisons. The network members orchestrated an array of dissemination strategies, such as developing print and online resources and conducting forums and presentations for districts and schools, institutions of higher education, superintendents, curriculum directors, Title I project managers, teacher groups, and principals.

In December, the state team surveyed the teams from the summer institute and planned a follow-up institute for January 2008 that would address district and school needs in relation to implementation of local literacy initiatives. At the winter summit, over 300 educators attended to learn about data teams, personalized planning, student support programs, and the resources and supports available from the department and the network.

In the spring of 2008, the Literacy Leader Network initiated a series of regional meetings to reinforce elements essential to successful implementation, share successes and challenges, present effective classroom strategies, and distribute and discuss professional resources. These were well-attended events: more than 100 teachers, administrators, and literacy coaches participated in one of the final meetings.

Strengthening Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

As part of a comprehensive professional development program, New Hampshire trained a cadre of school improvement coaches in the use of literacy instructional practices to guide classroom instruction and is in the process of developing a handbook for literacy coaches. Literacy coaches are contracted locally to provide assistance in implementing content-based literacy instruction.

NHDOE also established a collaborative project with NH READS (Reading Excellence Across Disciplines), supported by a federal Title II grant (see New Hampshire Reading Excellence Across Disciplines at www.nhreads.org). Other partners include the Southeastern Regional Education Service Center, Plymouth State University, and three pilot partner districts in providing training and school consultation focused on integrating research-based literacy strategies into specific content areas.

In August 2008, NH READS and its partners conducted a summer institute on comprehension strategy instruction that was widely attended by district and school staff. The partnership continues to provide training for content area teachers at various locations across the state in pursuit of its major goals:

- providing training on reading research, especially strategies to improve reading comprehension;
- providing conferences and on-site visitations to assist teachers with planning and instruction;
- coordinating activities with state literacy initiatives;
- conducting qualitative and quantitative evaluation activities to provide evidence of improvement in reading scores in targeted classrooms; and
- compiling resources for parents and community members that address key reading skills in the content areas.

Finally, over the past two years, certification revision committees have integrated literacy competen-

cies into all of the content standards. The standards were drafted, reviewed, and submitted first to the Council for Teacher Education, responsible for higher education program approval, and then to the Professional Standards Board. Finally, the proposed revised standards for English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies for elementary, middle, and high school teachers were submitted to the New Hampshire State Board of Education for formal adoption as teacher certification standards. The standards have been adopted and will apply to the requisite competencies for teachers that must be addressed by preservice programs.

These new teacher standards identify the teaching competencies needed to provide literacy instruction in relation to the specific discipline. The language arts consultant at NHDOE worked extensively with the certification revision committees to ensure that the language reflected research-based literacy practices and captured important knowledge and skill applications within each content area. NHDOE staff members have continued their practice of working with higher education teacher preparation programs, visiting both undergraduate and graduate education classes, presenting the Literacy Action Plan, the research on adolescent literacy and instruction, and the New Hampshire curriculum standards, and responding to questions from preservice teachers and graduate students.



Utah developed the following strategies to advance adolescent literacy as part of its State Adolescent Literacy Network grant:

- 1) align state achievement standards, curricula, and assessment practices;
- 2) ensure that teachers have effective preservice preparation and ongoing professional development that lead to licensure and recertification by requiring content-area reading courses, updating the Utah Secondary Reading Endorsement requirements, and providing multiple forms of professional development to teachers and principals; and
- 3) promote district literacy plans by establishing model sites, providing technical assistance and resources, and securing funding for broad implementation.

NASBE's role has been to help the states strengthen the linkages between overarching educational goals and initiatives with specific changes in classroom instruction targeted at improving students' reading and writing. Utah focused on aligning standards, curricula, and assessments to foster two educational goals: increasing the rigor of academic preparation by integrating literacy learning into content areas and differentiating instruction in response to the strengths and weaknesses of individual learners.

The state designed frameworks to embed literacy within subject areas and to foster implementation of the newly developed 3-Tier Model of Reading Instruction, which serves as the primary vehicle to help all Utah secondary students acquire literacy skills and to deliver a continuum of interventions and supports to struggling readers. The 3-Tier Model is used to provide research-based instruction and targeted interventions that will lead to successful reading. Based on student assessment data and collaborative team decisions, students move through the tiers or levels of instruction as follows:

Tier 1: Core Classroom Instruction — requires all secondary students take a reading course in how

to learn from content-area textbooks and other print materials and also includes the integration of literacy learning skills in all content-area classes;

Tier 2: Supplemental Targeted Instruction — provides developmental reading courses for all students who read below grade level, with targeted instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension skills based on students' reading strengths and needs; and

Tier 3: Intensive Targeted Intervention — delivers intensive, specialized services for the most at-risk readers.

(See Utah 3-Tier Model of Reading Instruction at www.schools.utah.gov/sars/servicesinfo/pdfs/3-tierread.pdf.)

The 3-Tier Model for secondary schools emanates from the state's Title I and special education Response to Intervention initiatives that link research-based practice, professional development, assessment, and progress monitoring to provide differentiated instruction and supports in accord with students' learning needs. The instruction focuses on core content learning and on providing a framework for organizing complementary sets of literacy strategies, skills, and interventions across the full range of student proficiency levels. In general, in order to produce a positive trajectory for reading achievement, the model calls for 1) explicit and systematic instruction of literacy skills through direct explanation, modeling, guided practice, and progress monitoring and 2) differentiated instruction through flexible grouping of students based on their ongoing identified needs.

Utah also considered how to link literacy improvements to its accountability and district and school improvement systems. For example, accreditation policies require schools to show evidence of interventions for underserved populations; plans are underway to expand this provision to include students who are not reading at grade level. Likewise, secondary schools receiving Title I funds must include in school improvement plans details on how they will intervene on behalf of striving readers.

District Literacy Plans

As part of its effort to shift from compliance monitoring to a service orientation, Utah focused pri-

marily on the district level to create system-wide supports for improving school-based literacy instruction. The state has provided forums and technical assistance to help districts design literacy plans based on the state's draft standards for secondary language arts and the state's 3-Tier Model of Reading Instruction. In addition, to help districts advance adolescent literacy, Utah has established model sites, held statewide forums for district teams on the design and implementation of literacy plans, and partnered with higher education and regional service agencies to provide technical assistance and build capacity for local implementation.

Utah's education department also conducted a statewide conference on "Taking Action on Adolescent Literacy" in November 2007. It targeted two goals: building the knowledge base and public awareness of the unacceptably high dropout rates and low literacy levels of adolescents statewide and across the nation; and encouraging and supporting school districts in developing district adolescent literacy plans that integrate scientifically proven literacy instruction strategies into content curriculum areas. It was attended by 45 district and school administrators and 143 teachers. Nationally prominent experts provided training on the five action steps driving the state's new leadership model for improving adolescent literacy: 1) developing an effective literacy action plan, 2) supporting teachers, 3) using data, 4) building capacity, and 5) allocating resources.

Model Demonstration Sites

In addition, a number of districts presented information on how they built professional learning communities, selected model curricula and programs to strengthen literacy instruction as part of the core curricula, and the lessons learned from their pilot work. Some of the participating districts included:

Jordan School District — As part of Jordan's Language Arts and Literacy program, the district designed a Tier 1 core curriculum for middle school teachers based on seven elements: the nature of reading, comprehension strategies, informational texts, responding to narrative text and oral language experiences, higher order thinking and writing, and diagnostic assessment and instruction. The design team created a template with time-frames, objectives, essential questions, instructional

activities, assessments, and other materials to help teachers incorporate the curriculum into their instruction. Sample lessons provided strategies to frontload the instructional activity, and there were model lessons and formats for guided and independent practice. Consistent with research showing the effectiveness of teaching strategies such as summarizing, asking and answering questions, paraphrasing, and finding the main idea, the district incorporated these types of routines and procedures that readers use to help them make sense of text.

Murray School District — In concert with state and local educational goals for students to develop deep and critical knowledge of subject matter, Murray School District developed the Secondary Literacy Framework to provide guidance to secondary teachers for literacy learning in all content areas. The framework is anchored in the Utah State Core Curriculum and reflects the research on adolescent literacy and evidence-based practice.

The framework focuses on developing students' skills in structural analysis and vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and communication skills. It directs secondary teachers and school administrators to support literacy instruction by providing explicit instruction and modeling of comprehension strategies useful to content areas; before-, during-, and after-reading activities to increase deep processing of text; word study and vocabulary; and written and oral work.

The role of school and district administrators in supporting literacy learning receives particular emphasis in Murray's framework, and includes the following:

- providing professional development that is based on scientifically researched strategies that support teachers and administrators in implementing literacy learning;
- providing effective assessments for identifying literacy needs of all students in grades 7-12;
- assuring that interventions and enrichment are driven by student assessment results;
- coordinating necessary courses, interventions, and services for struggling readers; and

- providing guidance, resources, coaching, supervision, and support for literacy in all classrooms.

Ogden City School District — In 2005, Ogden City School District initiated a two-year pilot to increase adolescent literacy for ninth-grade students at Ogden and Ben Lomond High Schools. Ben Lomond opted to implement the West Ed Reading Apprenticeship Academic Literacy (RAAL) program. RAAL is designed to help adolescents develop the knowledge and skills to become discipline-based readers. Teachers serve in a mentorship role, drawing on their expertise in content areas to engage students in processes by which readers insight into their own reading processes. The goal is to help students develop a range of problem-solving procedures for overcoming obstacles to reading texts and deepening comprehension of material from various academic disciplines. Informal data collected following implementation of the RAAL showed that students who participated in the academic literacy class outperformed a comparison group of students who did not participate on measures of reading, writing, and Utah content standards.

Ogden High School implemented the University of Kansas' Xtreme Reading program, which is built on 25 years of research on effective literacy instruction. The program uses a "learning strategies" curriculum to help students build a repertoire of strategies and reading and writing skills essential to meeting the demands of secondary school. Strategy instruction is taught in three strands for the following purposes:

- **Acquiring Information**—includes strategies on how to paraphrase, use picture information to promote understanding and remembering, ask questions and make predictions about text information, and identify unknown words in text;
- **Studying Information**—includes strategies for developing mnemonics and other devices to aid memorization of facts as well as strategies for learning new vocabulary and preparing students for tests; and
- **Self Expression**—includes strategies to help students write sentences and paragraphs, monitor their work, and confidently approach and take tests.

A description of Xtreme Reading is available at www.xtremereading.com/pages/challenge.html.

Policy Structures

The state education department drafted a measure to secure funding for a state Adolescent Literacy Initiative that was approved by the Utah State Board of Education and submitted to the legislature during the 2008 legislative session. The measure did not pass, but served to heighten the awareness of the urgency to infuse literacy into content-area teaching and to provide a continuum of supports to striving readers. Throughout Utah, districts have asked the Utah State Office of Education to sustain the Utah Adolescent Literacy Network even without dedicated funding.

Utah also convened state office education specialists, district reading specialists, and teachers to examine the Utah Secondary Language Arts Core and other content areas during the grant period. The goal was to create policy structures to scale effective literacy instruction as central to standards-based reform. The committee analyzed policies, particularly those governing content standards, and determined that the Language Arts Core, adopted in 2006, needed broadening to address research-based literacy skills including vocabulary, structural analysis, use of comprehension strategies, self-monitoring, and writing.

In addition, the language arts curricula as initially articulated was only minimally related to core curricula for science, mathematics, and social studies. Core content standards focused primarily on textbook characteristics rather than addressing the reading and writing skills essential to increasing student learning of content information and to demonstrating understanding and mastery. Moreover, the standards did not incorporate the development and application of comprehension strategies such as predicting and summarizing passage content, generating questions about content information, and monitoring comprehension to increase learning from content-area text.

Utah's Curriculum and Instruction Division worked with local content-area experts, district leaders, and national consultants to examine the Utah Core Curriculum and incorporate literacy learning skills into subject area domains. In follow-up interviews with project staff, the state coordinator emphasized the need to incorporate literacy strands within content standards to promote collective accountability for adolescent's performance in content-area reading

and writing. As a result, the committee drafted new content standards that integrate critical literacy skills; the regulatory document is currently in draft form under review and revision.

Finally, the state established two Language Arts Reading Endorsements at the "basic" and "advanced" levels in order to create an infrastructure of instructional supports for implementing school-wide literacy instruction. The Utah State Office of Education developed the course framework for these endorsements that focuses on curriculum-based measurement and the assessment/instructional cycle, using assessment data to design and implement instructional interventions to increase students' reading achievement; deploying instructional strategies to address students' reading strengths and needs; and monitoring students progress to ensure they are making optimal progress in reading.

Moving Forward

To continue advancing adolescent literacy in Utah beyond the grant cycle, the state has targeted the following action steps:

- 1) Requiring district adolescent literacy plans to show how districts will strategically use adolescent student achievement data to identify district-level literacy and content-learning strengths and needs; develop specific interventions for striving readers; provide training for teachers in the content areas; and monitor student progress to plan and adjust instruction on an ongoing basis.
- 2) Designing a state-level evaluation plan to serve as a model for a district-level evaluation that measures the effectiveness of programs, ensures that district-level literacy planning is central to improvement efforts, and leads to ongoing program enhancements.
- 3) Providing professional development in the knowledge base for increasing adolescent literacy; building on the existing Utah Secondary Literacy Model to develop required university coursework in literacy and content-area instruction; and ensuring that this knowledge is the basis for preparation, ongoing professional development, and licensure standards for all Utah administrators, literacy teachers, and content-area teachers.

West Virginia

West Virginia adopted the following strategies:

- 1) designing and implementing the Adolescent Instruction Model (AIM) for Literacy pilot;
- 2) partnering with higher education to review and enhance teacher education programs to ensure strong content area literacy instruction and supports to struggling readers; and
- 3) using the knowledge from the AIM pilot schools to create sustainable policy structures, build state capacity, and meet the professional learning needs of teachers.

These strategies were interconnected to build and strengthen the design of the AIM framework and expand its replication in schools throughout the state. The state designed iterative processes to implement, evaluate, refine, and replicate the model while extending opportunities for professional development in adolescent literacy to teachers and administrators.

West Virginia strategically embedded literacy performance standards and instructional strategies as core elements of its principal improvement initiative—The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, which frames and connects the state’s education policies, accountability system, professional development, and academic curricula. As a result, the state liaison reported that literacy improvement received more strategic attention and greater traction than more isolated efforts. The project liaison, who leads the English language arts division within the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE), coordinated the adolescent literacy initiative with Title I and special education divisions in their efforts to build capacity for local implementation of Response to Intervention models.

AIM Pilot

In August 2007, West Virginia launched its four-tiered AIM for Literacy pilot in six middle and high schools. The AIM framework provides a coherent

and coordinated school-wide literacy program for improving overall achievement levels in literacy, maintaining grade level literacy skills through high school, and accelerating literacy in those students below grade level. West Virginia agency staff worked with leadership teams in each of the six pilot schools to address the professional development needs of staff based on a self-assessment survey that addresses four areas: collaborative leadership and school capacity; emphasis on content reading; intervention and support for adolescent readers; and professional development to support literacy.

Schools were directed to identify a leadership team; develop a professional development plan based on the survey results; create a supervision/evaluation plan; establish a regular grade-level team or department meeting to analyze student assessment information, model and practice lessons and problem solve; design a diagnostic flow chart; and establish an assessment plan. Middle schools and their receiving high schools co-developed plans, selected strategies and assessment tools, studied the model together, and provided other types of professional development to their staffs. Based on an individual pilot school’s self-assessment, the state provided extensive professional development to literacy teams and monitored implementation throughout the year. These schools will serve as demonstration models as the state works to expand AIM to an additional 54 middle schools across the state in 2009-10.

The outcomes from the pilot schools showed increases in the following areas: literacy awareness in all content classes; targeted instruction and interventions; use of small group instruction in all content classes; quantity of assessments for learning (e.g., formative assessments to guide modifications in instruction); participation in learning communities; and the involvement and the development of literacy leadership teams at each school with existing leadership support. The recommendations for improvements to AIM were to allow for small steps in implementing the framework (particularly with respect to application to content areas), strengthen skills in progress monitoring and differentiating instruction in all classes, and address scheduling and staffing needs at the beginning of the process.

Teacher Development and Capacity Building

West Virginia developed a number of vehicles to strengthen the capacity and knowledge of teachers to improve reading and writing across the curriculum and provide supports to struggling readers. The state department of education embedded extensive resources and materials in its teaching requirements for effective grade 4-12 literacy instruction, emphasizing the research on instructional strategies to improve reading and writing skills. State leaders recognized that balancing content learning and literacy places many demands on teachers' skills, knowledge, and experience, and so provided specific tools and guidance, training, and resources. Supports included embedded and extended professional development, study groups and professional learning communities, classroom-based coaching and modeling, print and web-based resource materials; and strong support from district and school leaders.

Included in this support was the state's new Teach 21 website, which serves as a repository for aligned literacy and content resources such as instructional guidelines, strategy banks, power standards, and assessments (see wvde.state.wv.us/teach21/). Many divisions within the West Virginia Department of Education (including curriculum and instruction, technology, assessment, high school, adult education and workforce development, special education, and secondary programs) collaborated to align organizational structures, resource allocation, and accountability systems in support of the overarching strategy.

WVDE also created a step-by-step literacy plan to guide local implementation that was posted on the Teach 21 website (see wvde.state.wv.us/instruction/aim_literacy.html). This guide provides a rich compilation of resources and information that describes elements of a total reading program, instruction, and interventions in relation to West Virginia's content standards and objectives, assessments, and professional development, as well as to building literacy leadership teams and professional culture (see wvde.state.wv.us/Teach21/public/PS/mainmenuPS.cfm). WVDE's Office of Instruction provided guidance to teachers in creating instructional guides, standards-based lessons, and problem-based learning units with literacy at the core.

The plan outlines the elements of a reading program, including the core reading components, intervention programs for struggling readers, and application to research-based content literacy instruction. Elements call for attention to:

- Explicitly linking reading and writing instruction with content instruction;
- Emphasizing deep conceptual understanding through reading instruction;
- Providing explicit instruction in vocabulary and in the application of reading comprehension strategies; and
- Continuously and systematically engaging students in whole class and small group discussions of challenging content and literature.

West Virginia continues to work with its university partners to extend knowledge about effective literacy instruction statewide. The state team provided webinars throughout the grant on a range of topics, including the AIM for Literacy model, literacy team basics, strengthening the core program, universal assessments, vocabulary development, and implementation at the high school level. The state is now working on the design of performance assessments aligned to state standards that will emphasize literacy skills in demonstrating specific content knowledge and skills.

Expanding AIM Implementation

The WVDE promotes collaboration with eight Regional Education Service Agencies (RESA), teacher preparation programs, and the West Virginia Professional Development Schools to provide leadership in advancing adolescent literacy. The state established these networks in order to implement AIM for Literacy in an additional 54 middle schools in 2009-2010.

In addition, the West Virginia Center for Professional Development oversees all the professional development needed for teachers to earn advanced placement certification. These centers are integrating literacy instruction in their training and requirements for credentialing secondary teachers, which will ensure that educators are able to provide

instruction for students in the advanced tier of the AIM framework (described as students who exceed literacy benchmarks and demonstrate readiness for higher-level, discipline-specific text).

Finally, an “Improving Teacher Quality” state grant was awarded to RESA I involving collaborative efforts of the WVDE, Bluefield State College Teacher Education, and Concord University Teacher Education. Thirty middle school educators participated in the RESA I Reading English Language Arts Middle School Tiered Instruction Project. The project included sustained, intensive classroom-focused professional development experiences aligned with the 21st Century West Virginia Content Standards and Objectives (see wvde.state.wv.us/policies/csos.html). The teachers participated in a summer academy, which introduced the AIM framework and scientifically based instructional strategies in vocabulary and comprehension. Eight professional learning community meetings are being held during the 2008-09 school year.

Policy Structures to Scale and Sustain Literacy Improvements

West Virginia adopted new content standards that embed literacy performance skills as the foundation for its major improvement initiative—The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (see www.21stcenturyskills.org). The West Virginia State Board of Education adopted a policy titled “21st Century Reading and English Language Arts Content Standards and Objectives for West Virginia Schools” (see wvde.state.wv.us/policies/p2520.1_ne.pdf). Committees of educators from across the state convened to revise the content standard and objectives. The overarching goal was to build a rigorous, relevant, and challenging reading and English language arts curriculum that would prepare students for the 21st century. The standards incorporate reading, writing, listening, speaking, and media literacy that involve the use of literature and informational texts in language arts and other disciplines across the curriculum.

West Virginia educators played a key role in shaping the content standards to align with national standards, rigorous national assessments, and research in the field of reading and English language arts education. The contribution of these profession-

als was critical to ensuring the policy created was meaningful to classroom teachers and appeared in a format that can be easily understood and applied.

The West Virginia State Board of Education also revised its “Regulations for Education Programs” to allow local school districts greater flexibility in the implication of the “rigorous academic standards and high-quality programs that are essential for the 21st century teaching and learning initiative” (see wvde.state.wv.us/policies/p2510.pdf). Policy language was revised to remove restrictive language requiring a 225-minute block for core courses that must include 80 minutes of reading English language arts, reducing the requirement to no less than 180 minutes. This increased flexibility allowed middle and high schools to implement a tiered model that differentiates the nature and intensity of literacy interventions for secondary students. It provided for scheduling of a 90-minute uninterrupted block that could include reading and language arts instruction provided through whole class, small group, and reading center activities.

Appendix B. Improving Literacy Instruction: Moving from State Policy to Classroom Practice

A central theme of NASBE’s work in adolescent literacy is that for state literacy policies and programs to be effective, they must lead to actual instructional changes in the classroom. To accomplish this, leaders must be very conscious of how each policy and action ultimately works to improve teaching. The chart beginning below details the actions that must be taken at all the key levels—state, district, school, and classroom—in order to impact instructional practices and help students improve their reading skills. It is organized around five action areas: Planning, Quality of Teaching, Use of Data, Instructional Infrastructure, and Accountability. This matrix first appeared in NASBE’s policy primer, *From State Policy to Classroom Practice: Improving Literacy Instruction for All Students*.

| State | District | School | Classroom |
|--|---|--|--|
| Planning | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lead a collaborative process to build knowledge base and set vision to improve literacy as part of district and school improvement. - Design a state literacy plan that builds instructional capacity to improve adolescent literacy while providing flexibility to localize the initiative. - Dedicate staff within the state education agency to focus on adolescent literacy. - Build public awareness and advocacy for literacy initiative. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design a comprehensive literacy plan to provide research-based reading and writing instruction throughout the curriculum beginning in the early grades and continuing through high school. - Develop coordinated K-12 continuum of literacy development, setting goals and standards and ensuring alignment with curricula and assessments. - Ensure that all students have access to highly trained teachers, resources, and organizational supports to advance literacy throughout the curriculum. - Dedicate staff within the local education agency to focus on adolescent literacy. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement school-wide literacy initiatives as part of school improvement planning that includes content area literacy instruction and a continuum of support for all students. - Diagnose problems early and provide timely, differentiated levels of research-based literacy instruction for struggling readers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide effective, research-based interventions to infuse reading and writing instruction across the curriculum. - Use methods for providing content area literacy instruction and intensifying interventions as needed for struggling readers. |

| State | District | School | Classroom |
|--|---|--|---|
| Quality of Teaching | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fully articulate literacy standards that embed literacy instruction within content area learning. - Invest in teachers by ensuring that preparation and professional development provide teachers with knowledge and skills to improve adolescent literacy. - Examine design of preparation programs to ensure teachers receive training in content area literacy and methods to intervene with struggling readers. - Provide guidance on ongoing training, instructional tools, and supports for teachers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that teachers have the preparation and professional development to provide effective, content-based literacy instruction. - Outline the elements of high-quality professional development to provide all staff with research-based curriculum and opportunities to practice specific literacy instruction skills. - Ensure that leadership teams, support personnel, coaches, curriculum specialists, and teachers have ongoing training in literacy instruction. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide intensive (including embedded) training that provides teachers with clear direction on how to use research-based practices within their different content areas. - Create opportunities for peer observation, demonstration lessons, curriculum and lesson planning, dialogue, and coaching to improve literacy instruction. - Organize training and coaching resources around teams of teachers in the same content area. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explicitly link reading and writing instruction with content instruction. - Emphasize deep conceptual understanding through reading instruction. - Provide explicit instruction in vocabulary and in the application of reading comprehension strategies. - Continuously and systematically engage students in whole class and small group discussions of challenging content and literature. - Create connections within and across lessons, reinforcing vocabulary and conceptual development across multiple texts and contexts. |
| Use of Data | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design robust longitudinal data systems to track individual student performance. - Strategically use data to identify areas of need, design cohesive policies, and evaluate the impact of the literacy initiative on students' performance. - Equip districts and schools with the data systems and tools to implement literacy programs and supports. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use a data-management system that provides high utility for multiple purposes, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generating frequent, timely data to track improvement over time and adjust instruction for individual students; • Providing detailed performance data on student strengths and weaknesses; • Identifying at-risk students; • Linking information about the instruction, services, and resources students receive and their outcomes; and • Providing timely evaluation data to inform school and district decisions. - Evaluate quality of implementation and impact of district programs on students' literacy performance and content learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify the data that will be collected to achieve ongoing progress monitoring of schools. - Administer screening, progress monitoring, outcome assessments, and diagnostic testing frequently. - Use diagnostic and formative assessments to provide supports and interventions to accelerate the progress of struggling readers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measure and analyze student literacy performance and content area achievement to inform instruction and identify struggling readers. - Use assessment data regularly to monitor progress and guide reading instruction and professional development. |

| State | District | School | Classroom |
|--|--|---|--|
| Instructional Infrastructure | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design instructional infrastructure to support coordinated literacy instruction in all grades in collaboration with practitioners and higher education. - Articulate rigorous student literacy standards and curriculum frameworks for content area literacy instruction. - Develop a K-12 continuum for reading development with recommended materials, planning guides, and model lessons. - Provide guidance and tools that include aligned diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, curriculum frameworks, and tools to support research-based instructional practice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure there is leadership committed to implementing school-wide literacy initiatives. - Be creative in the use of local monies to provide the resources, training, and supports to achieve targeted literacy goals. - Develop anchor standards and aligned core curriculum and assessments to support instruction grounded in research on effective practice. - Ensure that schools have the flexibility and incentives to design organizational structures and schedules to differentiate literacy instruction in accord with individual students' needs. - Ensure that schools have the range of instructional materials, multimedia materials, diverse texts, and resources needed to improve students' literacy skills. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide schools with funding, supports, and resources needed to achieve literacy goals for all students. - Provide extended blocks of time for reading instruction and for weekly professional development opportunities. - Form reading leadership teams to design literacy instruction in content areas and for struggling readers. - Promote teacher leadership in designing, evaluating, and improving instructional tools and practices. - Provide teachers and schools with consistent support from dedicated, specialized staff who provide support at the school level. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide methods for providing classroom supports and intensifying interventions for individual students. - Provide feedback, models, and tools to integrate text comprehension strategies and writing instruction across the curriculum. - Train administrators in evaluating teachers on content area literacy instruction. |
| Accountability | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure ongoing oversight and monitoring to hold districts and schools accountable for improving adolescent literacy performance. - Require coherent district and school literacy plans based on detailed information on students' needs. - Evaluate the impact of literacy initiatives and refine them based on multiple indicators of literacy performance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide sufficient guidance and oversight to ensure strong implementation of comprehensive literacy programs. - Institutionalize teaching practice through summer institutes, ongoing training, access to higher education, school administrators, coaches, and regional trainings; and align the recertification process with professional development. - Build networks for cross-classroom, cross-school, and cross-district learning and partner with higher education, community, and external organizations. - Examine literacy performance data to refine district literacy plans. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a professional community and ongoing training and supports based on effective strategies that emphasize collective responsibility and collegiality. - Link performance evaluations of principals, coaches, and teachers to instructional practice and student achievement in reading. - Use school and classroom literacy performance results to improve school-wide literacy instruction and target supports for individual students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support and monitor implementation of reading instruction, assessment expectations, and student literacy performance. - Use assessment data to refine instruction and programs. |

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