



ALL CHILDREN CAN READ BY FOURTH GRADE

Early Language and Reading Success

Key Facts

- Brain research informs us that reading is teachable to 95 percent of our students. Yet 10 to 40 percent of them will have difficulty learning to read and will need specialized instruction.
- More than one-third of poor children enter formal kindergarten classes already behind their peers. By fourth grade, more than 50 percent of these children will not meet the standard for reading proficiency.
- Experts agree that language and literacy development play an important role in general child development and a specific role in learning to learn. The relationship between language and literacy begins in the preschool years and evolves toward increasing refinement and specificity through the elementary and middle grade years.
- Children who have reading problems in third grade have reading problems in later grades. They fall further behind each year they do not receive support.
- Before entering formal education, children should have more than 1,000 hours of experience with books, have been included in conversation, been exposed to print and writing in their daily life, understand how to handle books, and been read to by an adult.
- Of every 100 children who leave first grade as poor readers, 88 will still be poor readers at the end of third grade, limiting their chances of academic and future workforce success. *(NLC Institute for Youth, Education and Families)*
- Six in ten (62 percent) of Connecticut fourth-graders are not proficient in reading. *(2005 National Assessment of Education Progress)*
- Connecticut has some of the largest achievement gaps in the nation: 11 percent of the state's black eighth-graders and 13 percent of Hispanic eighth-graders met the reading proficiency standard, compared to 42 percent of white students. *(2005 National Assessment of Education Progress)*



Connecticut Leads the Way in Linking School Readiness to Early Reading Success



Connecticut is the first state in the nation to link school readiness and school steadiness, through a comprehensive school readiness and early reading success legislative strategy. School readiness and early reading success are pivotal benchmarks to school success and life-long learning.

The School Readiness legislation seeks to meet the National Education Goal that every child is ready to learn upon entry to kindergarten, through a comprehensive preschool plan. The Early Reading

Success focus seeks to halt social promotion, create optimal early learning environments in kindergarten through third grade, and to ensure that every child is reading at grade level.

What Connecticut Has Done

1997 -- The Connecticut legislature unanimously adopted the School Readiness Act (PA 97-259), which created a comprehensive preschool initiative for three- and four-year-olds, with attention paid to health, safety, and quality learning. The emergent literacy and communications components (Sec 10-16q) include:

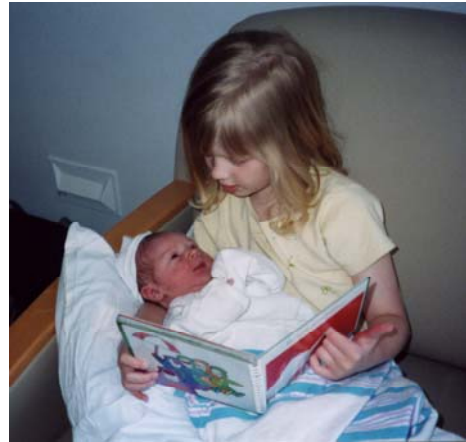
- **Preliteracy practices.** School Readiness Councils must provide a plan for the incorporation of appropriate preliteracy practices and teacher training in such practices.
- **Family literacy programs.** These incorporate adult basic education and provide for the promotion of literacy through access to public library services.
- **Professional development.** Staff must train in preliteracy skills development with training designed to assure respect for racial and ethnic diversity.

1998 – The legislature adopted Early Reading Success (PA 98-243) legislation to help children succeed in the early grades. This Act provided an additional \$20 million to urban and priority school district for early reading intervention. With this financial support, the following requirements were added: early assessment (Grades 1-3), individualized reading plans and the offering of after-school and summer opportunities to improve reading for all students in urban and priority school districts.

This legislation also offered resources for research based practices to bolster the success of the young student through full day kindergarten, reduced class sizes and a reading plan for teachers in grades kindergarten to three that emphasizes the teaching of reading, assessment of reading competency and reading intervention.



1999 – With the Education Accountability Act (PA 99-288), the legislature addressed social promotion of students. The Act requires schools to explain why children are promoted if they have not reached grade-level expectations. It also requires schools to evaluate the reading level of students in grades one to three in the middle of the school year and at the end of the school year. Parents must be notified if their children are reading below grade level by the middle of the year. By the end of the year, the school must develop a personal reading plan for the student.



1999 - An Act Concerning a State-wide Early Reading Success Institute (PA 99-227) established the development of an Early Reading Success Panel (1999-2000), an assessment of priority school district's institutional and teacher needs related to reading success, and the development of a three year in-service plan in the urban and priority districts based on the panel's recommendations. It also developed an Early Reading Success Institute to commence in the 2000-2001 year.

The charge of the Reading Panel was to determine the skills and knowledge that teachers need to teach reading effectively and to use current research to develop a list of skills and understandings required by teachers to teach reading in grades K-3. The panel consisted of teachers, reading experts, parents and librarians. When this panel reached agreement, using the best reading research and scholars in the nation, they wrote a report to the General Assembly and the Commissioner of Education. (*Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement*)

The Reading Panel's findings stress the need for teacher training in:

- instructional strategies that can be adapted for each student's needs;
- early screening and ongoing assessment to determine which individual students need additional instruction;
- teaching of oral language competencies including vocabulary, listening comprehension and grammatical skills;
- systematic teaching of word identification skills including phonics instruction and instruction in phonemic awareness; and
- teaching of comprehension competencies, including the use of context to infer meaning and evaluation.



In addition, each priority district was required to develop and implement a three year in-service reading instruction plan for the professional development of the district's librarians, elementary teachers in grades kindergarten through three, provided spaces were available, at the statewide institutes.



2000 – The legislature codified the Reading Panel and its findings into Connecticut law regarding literacy.

1999-2006 – Congress, through several federal grants, supported New Haven-based Haskins Laboratories' pilot program to model teacher training of reading in Connecticut schools through several different federal grant allocations.

2004 – An Act Concerning New Teachers in Training (PA 04-75) required that, beginning in July 2006, any program of teacher preparation leading to professional certification must include, as part of the curriculum, instruction in literacy skills and processes that reflects current research and best practices

in the field of literacy training.

2006 – Legislation did the following for the Early Reading Success grant program:

- **Administration:** Public Act 06-188 appropriated \$150,000 to the state Department of Education for the hiring of a highly qualified reading expert to oversee the state reading program and to ensure implementation of research-based teacher training and professional development.
- **Early intervention:** Public Act 06-83 required more intensive remedial intervention for students in grades 1 through 3 who were not reading on grade level. Local superintendents must justify promoting students not reading on grade level in writing to the state Department of Education. The state Board of Education was required to publish a report on the status of these students. Prior law required principals and superintendents to report this information only for the promotion of third graders.
- **Research-based reading instruction:** Public Act 06-135 requires priority school districts to use Early Reading Success grant dollars more effectively by implementing onsite teacher training and coaching in embedding research-based reading instruction specified by the Early Reading Success Panel Report. Each district will have to report to the State Department of Education its progress in reducing the achievement gap in reading and how this data is used to guide professional development and teacher coaching.





What Remains to Be Done

- Pre-literacy - Enhance pre-literacy training for all state funded early care and education programs. Ensure that teachers are trained in emergent literacy and how to use song, conversation, rhyme and books to reach each child.
- Methodically institute all of the recommendations in the Reading Panel report. This report should become the primary tool for teacher training, curriculum development and early reading success in Connecticut. It should alter reading requirements in higher education, as teachers prepare for their profession.
- Create a reading coach model of teacher training in the classroom that prepares all teachers, k-3, in early literacy assessment, intervention and practice so that every child will learn to read on grade level by fourth grade. This model, based on proven research, has led to the most number of children moving forward, not entering special education and successfully mastering the art of reading.
- Reading Specialists: Authorize Haskins Laboratory as an Alternative Reading Course (ARC) institution to increase the supply of well trained reading specialists utilizing research based practice.
- Teaching New Teachers: Partner with the public teaching colleges in Connecticut to ensure substantive courses in the science of teaching reading as recommended by the State Reading Panel Report and codified in statute.
- Reach Out and Read: Expand Reach Out and Read, a nationally recognized program that embeds pre-literacy and reading in pediatric practice to enhance cognitive development.
- Formative Assessments & Curriculum: Create formative assessments in reading for students in grade K - 3 and let the assessments inform both curriculum and teacher training.

