

Excerpts on reading achievement from:

Fine by Nine: All Children Healthy, Safe and Successful in School by Age 9

**Final Report of the Goal 2 Committee to the Connecticut
Early Childhood Cabinet**

**Charlene Russell-Tucker and Elaine Zimmerman,
Co-chairs**

December 1, 2007

Revised May 8, 2008

[Awaiting final Cabinet action](#)

Mark McQuillan, Co-chair
Janice Gruendel, Co-chair
Early Childhood Cabinet

December 5, 2007

Dear Drs. McQuillan and Gruendel:

As co-chairs of the Cabinet's Goal 2 Committee, it is our great pleasure and honor to transmit to you our final report, *Fine by Nine: All Children Healthy, Safe and Successful in School by Age 9*, for consideration by the Cabinet. The report is the result of nine months of hard and creative work by a group of experts representing six Connecticut state agencies and many stakeholders, including classroom teachers, school principals and superintendents, experts in reading and teacher training, researchers, and advocates.

We have approached this work with a sense of urgency about the persistence of Connecticut's reading gap. We are united in our belief that reading is the key to the academic success of young children and that bold solutions are required immediately. At the same time, the Goal 2 report is a framework for a comprehensive plan for making all Connecticut children *Fine by Nine*, and the Goal 2 committee has identified six areas of strategic focus, all of which must be addressed in order to have a comprehensive strategy to turn the curve on your children's academic success.

Some of the strategies proposed in this report are long-term and require major policy changes; some will require additional research and the active engagement of major partners. However, many strategies can be implemented immediately since they are no-cost or low-cost and are within our responsibility and authority.

We are confident that the strategies outlined in the report, when implemented with fidelity, will be the conduit to our beginning the hard, daily work of putting into practice in every elementary school in this state those approaches which we know can work and are now working to improve the performance and lives of all of our children.

We look forward to helping the Cabinet implement the recommendation in this report.

Sincerely yours,

Elaine Zimmerman, Executive Director, Connecticut Commission on Children
Charlene Russell-Tucker, Associate Commissioner, State Department of Education

Final Report of the Goal 2 Working Group

Fine by Nine: All Children Healthy, Safe and Successful in School by Age 9

Revised May 5, 2008

I. Overview

This report by the Goal 2 Working Group of the Early Childhood Cabinet is designed to complete the Cabinet's Early Childhood Investment Plan, *Ready by Five and Fine by Nine*. Tasked with creating a framework for the result "All Children Healthy, Safe and Successful in School by Age 9," the committee's co-chairs, Fran Rabinowitz, Associate Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Education, and Elaine Zimmerman, Executive Director of the Connecticut Commission on Children, convened a group of experts representing six Connecticut state agencies and many stakeholders, including classroom teachers, school principals and superintendents, experts in reading and teacher training, researchers, and advocates. Work began in December 2006. During the fall of 2007, Fran Rabinowitz left SDE to become the superintendent of schools in Hamden. She was succeeded as co-chair by Charlene Russell-Tucker, Associate Commissioner of the State Department of Education.

The original report of the Goal 2 Working Group was submitted to the Early Childhood Cabinet in December 2007, and the Cabinet adopted the six strategic areas of the report in February 2008. At the request of the Cabinet, the co-chairs reconvened the team leaders of the six strategic areas to identify priorities within each strategic area and to make recommendations for action to the Cabinet. This revised report is submitted in support of the Goal 2 Working Group's strong consensus regarding the most urgent issues that require the attention of the Cabinet, state agencies, schools and school districts, communities, and families.

The working group's efforts have taken place over the last 16 months in a time of increasing attention to flagging test scores for Connecticut's students in reading and the persistence of Connecticut's "achievement gap," the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The term "achievement gap" is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African-American and Hispanic students and their non-Hispanic white peers, as well as the similar academic disparities between linguistically diverse students, students with disabilities, and students who qualify for free or reduced lunch and those who do not. The achievement gap shows up in class grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates. It has become a focal point of many education reform efforts within the state and in the nation as a whole.

The 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results show that the Constitution State's achievement gaps in reading and mathematics for all disadvantaged groups are among the largest in the nation. On the fourth grade reading and mathematics tests, for example, Connecticut has the largest difference in academic achievement between poor and non-poor students of all the fifty states. On the eighth grade reading and math tests, the results are the same: Connecticut has the largest gap between poor students and their wealthier peers. In a competitive global economy, the gaps measured by NAEP, Connecticut Mastery Tests, and other standardized tests translate into an unaffordable loss for the students involved and for their communities.

The cost to our society and our democracy has become insupportable. Connecticut is 45th out of 50 states in long-term job growth (Corporation for Enterprise Development 2007); has the second highest juvenile incarceration rate for Hispanic males and the third-highest rate for African American males (Office of Justice Programs 2004); experienced the largest increase in income inequality in the nation since 1988 (Economic Policy Institute, U.S. Census Bureau 2006); and, in 2007, for the first time ever, will spend more on its prisons than on its public higher education system (Office of Policy and Management 2006). If we allow this trend to continue, Connecticut's capital, both human and economic, will suffer.

The causes of poor school performance are complex. Children who come to school from communities with a high incidence of poverty have a higher risk of learning difficulties in school. More children are entering the schoolhouse with English as their second language. Some have had no experience in preschool. Still others have parents or guardians who are not literate themselves. Many schools have had difficulty responding to the academic and social needs of poor students. Similarly, many schools have been unable to appropriately respond to the diverse linguistic abilities of children and the physical or cognitive disabilities of all learners. Socio-economic factors, when not addressed appropriately, may contribute to the early academic difficulties that are reflected in state reading scores.

These factors define the context in which the education of our young children must take place. Daunting as some of these socio-economic challenges may be, however, they do not mean that educational failure for these students is inevitable or acceptable. Rather, they make it all the more urgent that we look critically at what we have yet to do in our communities and in our public institutions, especially in our schools. Much study has taken place in Connecticut and around the country to determine what makes schools successful. The good news is that we know what works and what we must do. The question is whether we have the will to do it.

II. Highlights of the Six Areas of Strategic Focus

The Goal 2 Working Group is proposing six key and interrelated strategic areas that, when pursued in concert, will “turn the curve” on early school success:

- *highly effective staff teaching*
- *healthy children to be*
- *fluent readers, with*
- *family and community support, in a*
- *safe and welcoming school environment guided by*
- *dynamic school leaders.*

The six preceding concepts summarize the work of six subgroups of Goal 2 Working Group members who are experts in these content areas. The six subgroups are as follows: Reading Achievement; Health and Safety; Family and Community Involvement; Highly Effective Staff; Connected Students, Welcoming Schools; and Leadership in Creating a Professional Learning Community. What follows are the highlights of each group’s work. Reading is presented first because it is the most critical issue that we must address immediately. The full report of each work group is presented in Section V.

1. *Reading Achievement*

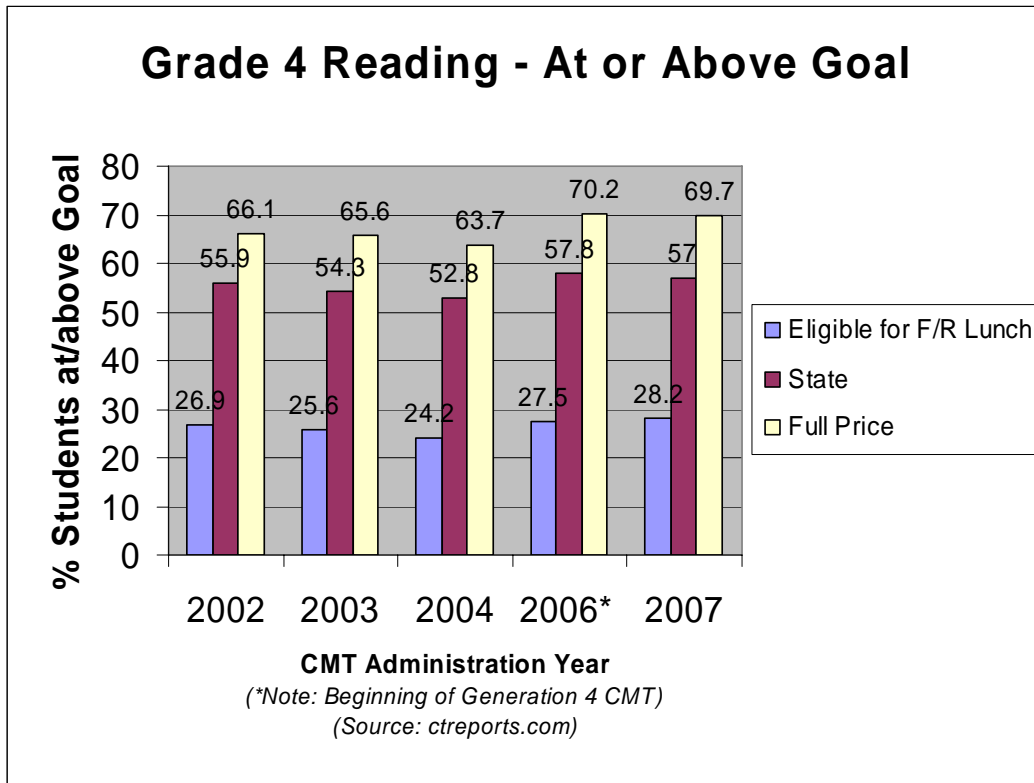
Research indicates that if children do not become proficient readers by age eight, there is a greater likelihood that they will be struggling readers throughout the rest of their school careers and into adulthood (Lyon, 1996). The National Institute for Literacy reports that 43 percent of individuals with the lowest literacy skills live in poverty, and approximately 70 percent of prisoners function at the bottom two out of five literacy levels (National Adult Literacy Survey).

Numerous national and state level analyses of reading achievement indicate that there is a high cost for reading failure. Connecticut’s alarming achievement gap means that this failure is most acute in communities with high proportions of poor and minority children. But reading failure affects all Connecticut communities because it translates into citizens who cannot fully participate in society or the workplace. With renewed urgency, Connecticut must first acknowledge that current strategies and practices employed to increase reading scores have not produced acceptable results and then move forward using the best educational research to devise an innovative, comprehensive, and coordinated plan that calls for critical actions by *all* stakeholders in shouldering the responsibility for high-quality literacy instruction.

The legislature has given the State Department of Education broad new power to ensure accountability and to intervene in school districts in need of improvement. Each district and school should be accountable for reading achievement and should immediately implement and enforce the new statewide education accountability plan. Critically, we need to ensure that all teachers have the content knowledge and pedagogical skills needed

to be effective teachers of reading and that faculty members at Connecticut’s institutes of higher education employ proven, research-based methods of instruction.

How We Are Doing



What Else We Would Like to Measure

Percent of students in grades 3 and 4 meeting expected performance on the state’s CMT Benchmark Assessments.

Key Policy Recommendations

1. Hold each district and school accountable for reading achievement by immediately implementing the State Department of Education statewide education accountability plan, including quality reviews of schools and the use of corrective action plans. Ensure that each school fully implements the key findings of scientific research in reading instruction as delineated in *Connecticut’s Blueprint for Reading Achievement: The Report of the Early Reading Success Panel*.
2. Implement a statewide pre-certification test of teacher training candidates on their mastery of evidence-based reading instruction for raising student achievement, including the goals and competencies delineated in the CT Blueprint and the systematic use of student achievement data to guide instruction.
3. Require schools to work with External Literacy Facilitators (literacy coaches) to provide direct assistance to teachers in applying proven reading methodology.

Shorter-Term Actions to Help Us Do Better

1. Require formative assessments in reading for all students in K-3 to inform and ensure differentiated instruction.
2. Research and apply effective instructional strategies for English Language Learners in the teaching of reading.

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V. Reports from the Six Work Groups

1. READING ACHIEVEMENT

I. Overview

The National Institutes of Health have identified low reading skills as a major public health issue. Like an undiagnosed disease, this quiet problem persists and becomes worse without intervention. The 2007 Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) in reading shows a large percentage of students reading below grade level. This trend harms our state in cost, morale, safety, and employment.

While the State Department of Education has taken steps to address this crisis, it is clear from national and state assessment data that the state must take additional steps – immediately.

The Cost of Reading Failure

To participate fully in society and the workplace, citizens need strong literacy abilities.

- Forty-three percent of those with the lowest literacy skills live in poverty, 17% receive food stamps, and 70% have no job (National Institute for Literacy).
- More than \$60 billion is lost in productivity each year by American businesses due to employees' lack of basic skills.
- In every study of at-risk youth and adults, dropouts, teen parents, welfare recipients, and the men and women in prison in America, one factor has always been documented: illiteracy or significant reading problems.
- Approximately 70% of prisoners function at the bottom two of five literacy levels (National Adult Literacy Survey).

Reading Achievement Data

Reading is teachable to 95% of our young students (Fletcher & Lyon, 1998). Yet Connecticut has one of the worst achievement gaps in the United States. While 65% of white students in grade 3 met the reading goal on the 2007 CMT, only 24% of black students and 23% of Hispanics did so.

Statewide, only 52% of Grade 3 students reached the reading goal. This decline reaches back several years, not just on the CMT but also on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). According to 2005 NAEP results, 62% of Connecticut's Grade 4 students were not proficient in reading. In Grade 3, poor students scored 36

percentage points lower on the CMT than higher income students. And when it came to reaching the CMT goal, white fourth-graders outperformed black and Hispanic students by more than 38 percentage points. And the situation is getting even worse. In 2007, on the fourth grade NAEP reading and mathematics tests, Connecticut has the largest difference in academic achievement between poor and non-poor students of all the fifty states.

The Causes of the Reading Trend

Connecticut faces a high incidence of poverty among children with high risk of school difficulty. Concurrent with this, more children are entering the schoolhouse with English as their second language. Some have had no experience in preschool. Still others have parents or guardians who are not literate themselves. These factors contribute to early reading difficulties and are reflected in the downturn in state reading scores.

These factors are all critically important, and they define the context in which the education of our young children must take place. However, they do not tell the entire story and do not mean that educational failure is inevitable or acceptable. Rather, they make it all the more urgent that we look honestly at what we have yet to do and acknowledge that the downturn in reading scores is also attributable to:

Lack of consistency in implementing state reading laws. Connecticut wrote model legislation to improve teachers' skills, yet fidelity to the legislation and other model reading laws over the last decade has not been strong in some districts. Although there were several studies to ascertain outcomes in early reading success, the findings were not used systemically and there were no consequences for poorly performing districts.

Local control with no coordinated state accountability. The State Department of Education believed it lacked the legal authority to intervene with local school districts. That has been corrected with a new Connecticut law providing education accountability and results-based accountability requirements in reading.

Most education schools do not teach the science of reading. The National Council on Teacher Quality reveals that most education schools do not teach current research-tested findings in reading. Teachers who have this information can help every child read. Yet, in a Connecticut study, only 40% of teachers with high levels of course preparation and experience could identify three risk factors for reading failure in kindergarten.

Many teachers do not know how to translate formal and informal assessments into changes in instructional practice. Knowing how to analyze student errors, give immediate corrective feedback, and be diagnostic and prescriptive in teaching is paramount for reading success. Additionally, teachers must be taught how to use the right tools to measure student growth in reading to inform instruction.

A lack of cross-sector, coordinated leadership on the state and local levels to create a system that works. According to NAEP results, Connecticut ranks last in closing the achievement gap. As reading scores have declined, the achievement gap has widened.

State education and higher education leaders, in partnership with elected officials, must insist on an analysis and methodology to “turn the curve” on this critical problem.

What Must Be Done

Although Connecticut was the first state to link school readiness and school steadiness through a comprehensive legislative strategy of school readiness and early reading success, it is apparent that more must be done. To that end, the state must:

- Hold each district and school accountable for reading achievement, including the use of State education funds, by immediately implementing and enforcing the new statewide education accountability plan.
- Utilize the document “Connecticut’s Blueprint for Reading Achievement: The Report of the Early Reading Success Panel” as the focal point for student and teacher competencies and update the research behind it.
- Work with Institutes of Higher Education to ensure that new and current faculty members have expertise in the science of reading and research-based practices (as recommended by *Connecticut’s Blueprint* and codified in statute).
- Require school districts to hire certified External Literacy Facilitators (ELF) to assist teachers weekly for modeling and demonstration of research-based reading methods as well as guided feedback for teachers as they apply the methods themselves. These ELFs should also be responsible for designing and delivering school-based professional development to meet teachers’ needs.
- Develop a licensing test for all new teachers responsible for teaching reading based on curriculum-based reading standards (National Council on Teacher Quality).
- Create incentives for teachers who consistently improve reading outcomes for students in kindergarten through grades three. For example, create a master teacher designation for those teachers who show that they have turned the curve in reading within their classroom. Provide performance bonuses for teachers who produce improvement in reading scores and award a ten-year recertification, rather than a five-year recertification, for teachers with the master teacher designation.
- For teachers who do not show improvement in the reading outcomes of their students, require specific and intensive research-based training in how children learn to read and in the skills and knowledge that teachers need to teach reading.
- Increase the number of hours of required professional development in reading from 15 hours of instruction to at least 30 hours of instruction.
- Ensure 90 minutes of direct instruction in reading in the classroom. Do not allow other activities during this period.

- Require formative assessments in reading for all students in K-3 to inform and ensure differentiated instruction.
- Require all schools to provide full-day kindergarten.

Fifty percent of Connecticut’s workforce in 2020 will come from the urban sector. Yet 50% of today’s urban-sector students don’t complete high school. This trend must be reversed now.

“It is clear that we need to do much more to address our students’ ability to read. We need significant change to have an impact on the achievement gaps that are now growing larger, not smaller.” - Commissioner Mark McQuillan

Statewide 2007 Connecticut Mastery Test Results: Grade 3

Group	Year	Mathematics		Reading		Writing	
		Total Mathematics		Total Reading		Total Writing	
		% At/Above Goal	% At/Above Proficient	% At/Above Goal	% At/Above Proficient	% At/Above Goal	% At/Above Proficient
State	2007	59.4	80.1	52.3	69.3	60.8	82.4
Male	2007	60.0	79.8	50.2	66.9	52.5	76.8
Female	2007	58.8	80.4	54.5	71.9	69.5	88.2
Black	2007	31.4	59.1	23.6	43.4	38.4	67.8
Hispanic	2007	34.0	61.4	22.9	41.7	38.0	66.4
White	2007	70.9	88.7	65.1	81.2	70.4	88.9
Asian American	2007	77.3	92.2	66.2	82.3	76.2	92.4
Am. Indian	2007	55.2	73.0	48.1	61.7	52.5	83.8
F/R Meals	2007	34.4	61.4	23.4	42.8	37.5	66.8
Full Price	2007	70.6	88.4	65.1	81.1	71.1	89.3
Special Ed.	2007	23.8	46.1	15.3	27.5	21.0	43.8
Not Special Ed.	2007	63.5	84.0	56.5	74.1	65.2	86.7
ELL	2007	26.1	52.5	10.3	24.6	27.0	55.5
Not ELL	2007	61.4	81.8	54.8	72.0	62.8	84.0

○ Results are not presented for groups fewer than 20.

II. Indicators for Reading Achievement

Headline Indicator

Percent of 3rd grade students at goal or above on CMT (effective 2008)

Key Secondary Indicators

1. Percent of 4th grade students at proficiency or above on NAEP
2. Percent of priority school district students in grades K-3 at grade level on Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)/Developmental Reading Assessment Second Edition (DRA2)
3. Percent of ELL students proficient on LAS Links (assessment of English language ability and proficiency)
4. Percent of kindergarten students assessed ready for school on K Inventory
5. Percent of 4th grade students at goal or above on CMT

Indicators to Be Developed

1. Percent of students in grades 3 and 4 meeting expected performance on the state's CMT Benchmark Assessments
2. Percent of students in grades K-3 reading at or above grade level as determined by formative assessments
3. Percent of teachers whose students make significant gains in reading
4. Literacy level of juvenile offender population
5. Literacy level of adult offender population

III. Data Development Agenda for Reading Achievement

1. Augment technology infrastructure at the district level and state level for collecting, by student identification number, DRA/DRA2 results to determine percent of students in grades K-3 reading at grade level (whole group and subgroup).
2. Implement formative assessments for grades K- 3.
3. Develop a consistent way to measure changes in student achievement in reading in grades Kindergarten through 3 and track those changes to the individual teachers.
4. Determine a standard for "ready for school" on the Fall Kindergarten Entrance Inventory and develop a method for reporting the percent of kindergarten students achieving that standard.

IV. Reading Achievement Strategy

Work with families, communities, and schools to ensure that all children have the knowledge and skills they need for reading at or above grade level (K-3).

Policy Recommendations

1. Hold each district and school accountable for reading achievement by immediately implementing the State Department of Education statewide education accountability plan, including quality reviews of schools and the use of corrective action plans. Ensure that each school fully implements the key findings of scientific research in reading instruction as delineated in *Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement: The Report of the Early Reading Success Panel*.

*2. Implement a statewide pre-certification test of teacher training candidates on their mastery of evidence-based reading instruction for raising student achievement, including the goals and competencies delineated in the CT Blueprint and the systematic use of student achievement data to guide instruction.

*3. Require schools to work with External Literacy Facilitators (literacy coaches) to provide direct assistance to teachers in applying proven reading methodology.

4. Develop a system for recognizing and rewarding master teachers based on the reading outcomes of their students. Provide performance bonuses for teachers who produce improvement in reading scores and award a ten-year recertification, rather than a five-year recertification, for teachers with the master teacher designation. For teachers who do not show improvement in the reading outcomes of their students, require specific and intensive research-based training in how children learn to read and in the skills and knowledge that teachers need to teach reading.

Shorter-term Strategies and Action Steps

1. Implement and enforce the statewide education accountability plan to ensure that all schools are teaching all students to read.

A. Require formative assessments in reading for all students in K-3 to inform and ensure differentiated instruction.

B. Increase the number of hours of required professional development in reading from 15 hours of instruction to at least 30 hours of instruction.

C. Ensure at least 90 minutes of direct instruction in reading in the classroom each day. Do not allow other activities during this period.

2. Partner with institutions of higher education and state agencies to ensure that all teachers, principals and other educators have the skills and expertise to teach reading effectively to all children.

- A. Research and apply effective instructional strategies for English Language Learners in the teaching of reading.
 - B. Mandate and work with school districts to provide content and pedagogical training in the science of reading for teachers and administrators in schools not making acceptable progress.
 - C. Work with IHEs to ensure they have new and current faculty with the expertise to develop and provide coursework that provides content knowledge and pedagogy in the science of reading as delineated in *Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement: The Report of the Early Reading Success Panel*.
 - D. Increase the number of college courses focused on content knowledge and pedagogy in the science of reading that are required to obtain a teaching certificate in Elementary Education.
 - E. Add courses in content knowledge and pedagogy in the science of reading to the requirements for obtaining an administrative certificate.
3. Empower and encourage families to build partnerships with schools to support effective literacy instruction.
- A. Improve family knowledge and skills about how to support reading at home and at school, and help parents understand the role of being a partner in early language development, talking and reading to children, and school success.
 - B. Have schools welcome family involvement and parents as partners in learning.
 - C. Provide community resources for a family literacy continuum, preschool and after school programs, adult learning, parent education and leadership.
 - D. Teach families how to advocate for children's learning and effective schools.

V. Information and Research Agenda for Reading Achievement

- 1. Conduct a validity study to determine if DRA2 scores are predictive of grade 3 CMT scores.
- 2. Identify the appropriate formative assessments to implement in grades K through 3.
- 3. Conduct reliability and validity studies on the kindergarten inventory.

VI. Tentative List of State Programs and Services That Contribute to Implementation of Reading Achievement Strategies

State Department of Education
Department of Higher Education
Haskins Lab
Family Resource Centers
Literacy Councils
Department of Children and Families