



Middle School Literacy: Turning Promise Into Practice

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“Reading is the key. Without it, the instructions for playing Monopoly, the recipe for Grandma’s lasagna, *The Cat in the Hat*, the directions to the job interview, the Psalms, the lyrics to *Stairway to Heaven* – all these and a lifetime of other mysteries large and small may never be known.”

(Kansas City Star newspaper)



What is Literacy?

- The “ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute, and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.

Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.”

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)



What is adolescent literacy?

- Grades 4-12
- Reading, writing, listening
- Literacy Instruction
 - Embedded content literacy for all students
(Tier I)
 - Interventions for struggling students
(Tiers II and III)



Who Has Reading Difficulties?

NAEP 2009

(National Assessment of Educational Progress)

- Percentage of students reading below a **Basic Level** of competence:
 - Grade 4 33%
 - Grade 8 25%
 - Grade 12 27% (2005)
- Percentage of students reading below a **Proficient Level** of competence:
 - Grade 4 67%
 - Grade 8 68%
 - Grade 12 65% (2005)



The Bad News

- Achievement gaps have not narrowed
- Losing ground on international comparisons
- Literacy and the drop out rate
- Lack of literacy skills for post-secondary education and the workforce
- 56% of adults in jail have very low literacy skills



College Readiness

- Only 51% of ACT-tested high school grads were reading for college-level reading
- Students readiness for college-level reading is at its lowest point in more than a decade

Reading Between the Lines, 2006, ACT



The New York Times

CUNY Adjusts Amid Tide of Remedial Students

“About three-quarters of the 17,500 freshmen at the community colleges this year have needed remedial instruction in reading, writing or math, and nearly a quarter of the freshmen have required such instruction in all three subjects. In the past five years, a subset of students deemed “triple low remedial” — with the most severe deficits in all three subjects — has doubled, to 1,000.

The reasons are familiar but were reinforced last month by startling new statistics from state education officials: fewer than half of all New York State students who graduated from high school in 2009 were prepared for college or careers, as measured by state Regents tests in English and math. In New York City, that number was 23 percent.” *March 3, 2011*



The Good News

- Since 2000 – significant attention to ad lit re: national standards, legislation, funding
- More research about “what works”
- Significantly more resources



Why should your middle school focus on literacy?





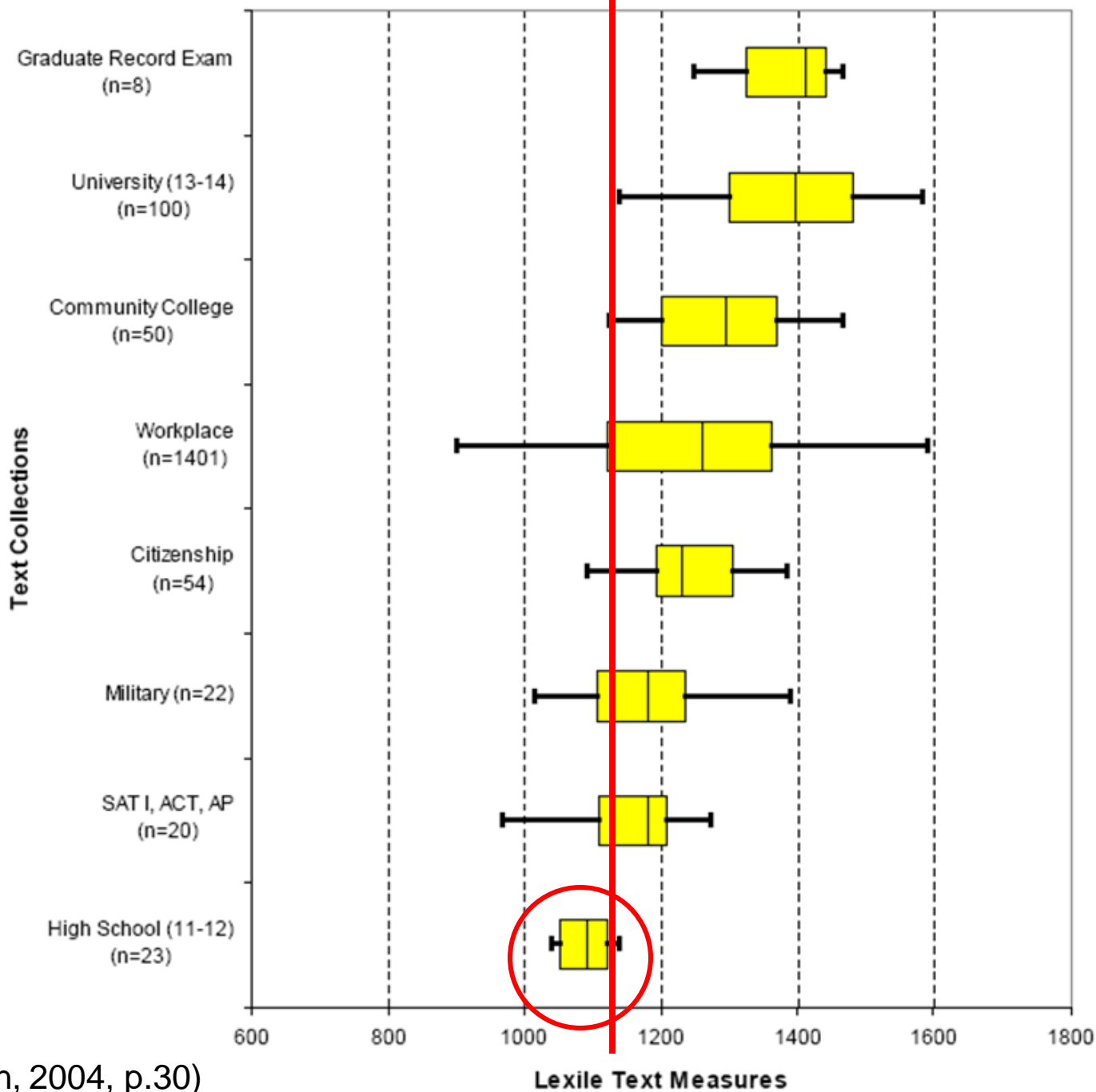


“In the United States, public schools deliver 85% or more of their curriculum by reading textbooks, whiteboards, worksheets, and computer screens. Students must read well to do well. **It matters little what else they learn in elementary school if they do not learn to read at grade level.** Even math depends on reading. There are far more words than numbers in math books. As the math concepts become more complicated, the verbal descriptions become more involved as well. As Kennewick has focused on reading, our math scores have improved at a rate similar to our reading scores. The reading problem becomes more obvious in middle school where students who cannot read well struggle to absorb content in all other subjects.” (Fielding, Kerr, Rosier, p. 39)



Common Core State Standards

- **Title:** CCSS for ELA & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects
- Key requirements of CCSS: all students must be able to comprehend texts of steadily increasing complexity as they progress through school.
- CCSS standards require the progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from whatever they read.
- More use of expository text starting in early grades





The Reading-Writing Connection

- Students need to be taught careful, analytical reading skills
- CCSS Writing Standards:
 - “the ability to write logical arguments based on substantive claims, sound reasoning, and relevant evidence is a cornerstone of the writing standards”
 - Emphasis on writing arguments, informative text, and narratives



What Should We Teach?

Content literacy for all students

plus

Interventions for struggling readers



Continuum For Literacy Instruction

Literacy instruction is not just a special education concern:



Struggling

Significant
intervention
time,
small-group
instruction

Weak

Some
support,
smaller size
classes,
target weak
areas

Grade Level

Grade-level
reading &
writing
embedded in
content
instruction

Above Grade

Advanced,
challenging
reading &
writing
embedded in
content
instruction



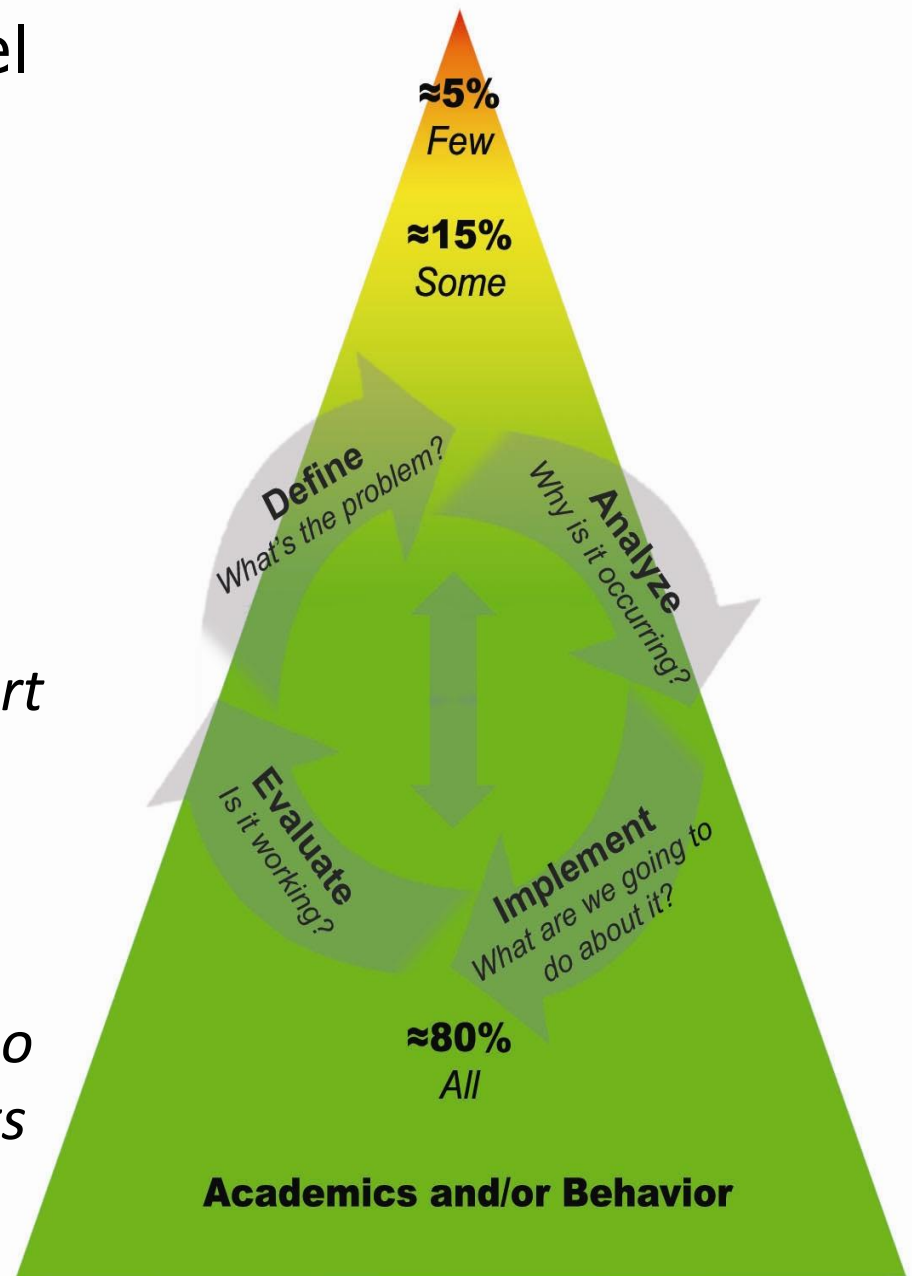
Three-Tiered Model

Literacy Instruction

Tier 3: Comprehensive & Intensive *Students who need individualized interventions.*

Tier 2: Strategic Interventions *Students who need more support in addition to the core curriculum.*

Tier 1: Core Curriculum *All students, including students who require curricular enhancements for acceleration.*





IES Report (2008)

5 instructional recommendations

1. Provide explicit vocabulary instruction
 2. Provide direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction
 3. Provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation
 4. Increase student motivation and engagement in literacy planning
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5. Make available intensive and individualized interventions for struggling readers that can be provided by trained specialists

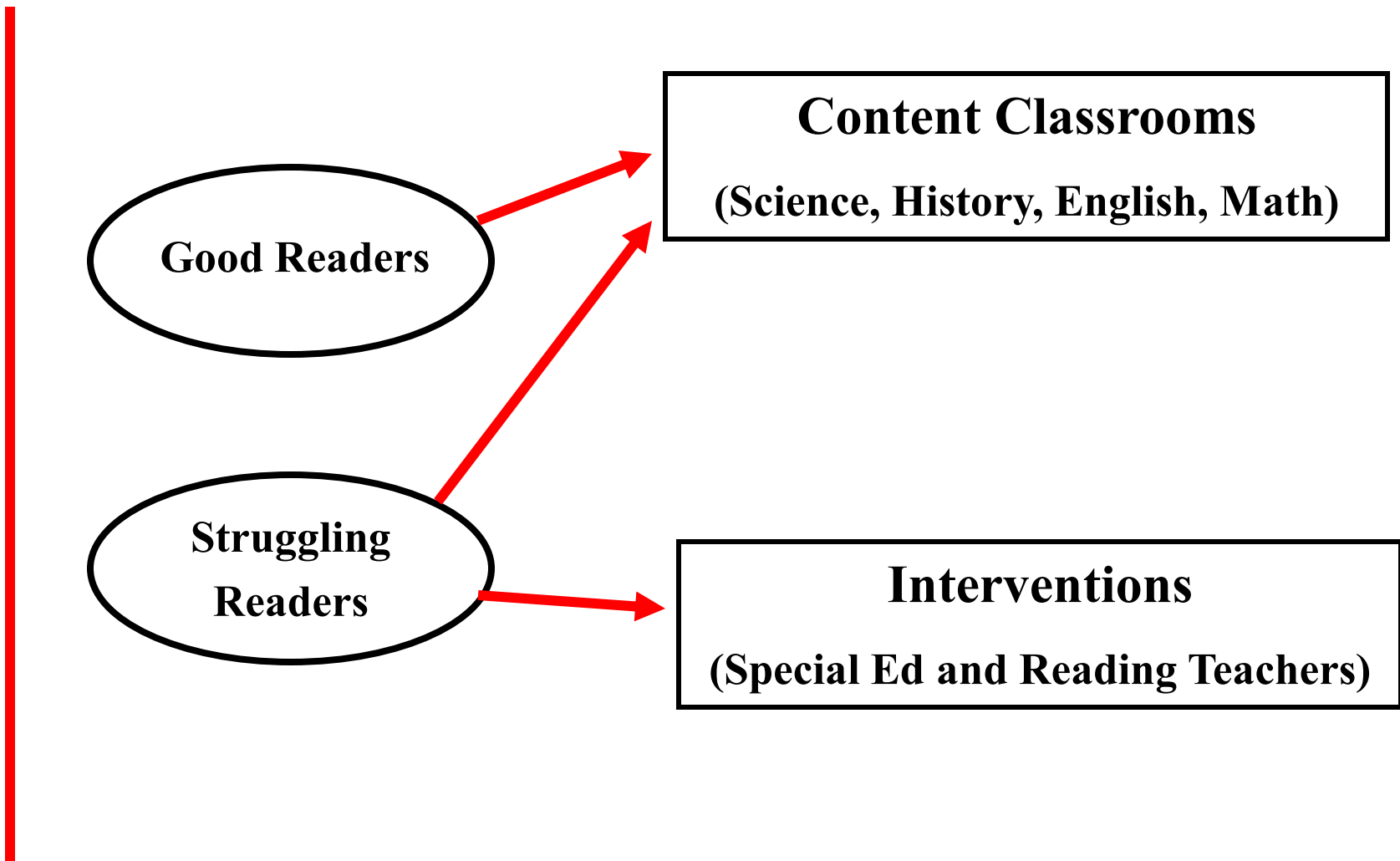


Why do all teachers need to get involved?

- If they learn to read in elementary school won't they be set?
- Can't students just take a reading class or get extra help?
- Can't the English teachers take care of it?



Specialists Can't Do It Alone!





Literacy Instruction in the Content Classroom

- Vocabulary growth
- Comprehension strategies
- Background knowledge
- Goals for reading in specific subject areas
- Reading/writing/study connection



Literacy Interventions

From “Reading Next”:

“Part of what makes it so difficult to meet the needs of struggling readers and writers in middle and high school is that these students experience a wide range of challenges that require an equally wide range of interventions. Some young people still have difficulty simply reading words accurately... Most older struggling readers can read words accurately, but they do not comprehend what they read for a variety of reasons. For some, the problem is that they do not yet read words with enough fluency to facilitate comprehension. Others can read accurately and quickly enough for comprehension to take place, but they lack the strategies to help them comprehend what they read.... In addition, problems faced by struggling readers are exacerbated when they are ESL or have learning disabilities.”

And: don't forget vocabulary!



What do we know about the characteristics of effective interventions

- They almost always increase the intensity of instruction
- They almost always provide many more opportunities for re-teaching, review, and practice
- They are focused carefully on the most essential learning needs of the students.



What were you like as a reader in high school?





The BIG question....

Do you want your students to be a reader/writer like you were?

If the answer is **YES** –
a collective concerted effort is required.

If the answer is **NO** –
a collective concerted effort is required.

*Either way – working together on this is
how to make it happen!*