

CONNECTICUT'S BLUEPRINT FOR READING ACHIEVEMENT

The Report of The Early Reading Success Panel



Connecticut State Department of Education — 2000

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Valerie Lewis (ex officio)
Interim Commissioner of Higher Education

Theodore S. Sergi
Commissioner of Education

*Connecticut's Blueprint
For Reading Achievement*

**The Report of the Early
Reading Success Panel**

This report reflects the consensus of the Early Reading Success Panel members and relies on many national documents and respected research. It was primarily written by Louise Spear-Swerling, professor at Southern Connecticut State University, with assistance and oversight by Betty J. Sternberg, Associate Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education.

Contents

Preface	v
Early Reading Success Panel	vii
Executive Summary	1
Conclusions	2
About This Report	7

Section I

Why Beginning Reading Instruction Matters	11
Introduction	11
The Nature of Proficient Reading	12
The Importance of Oral Language as a Foundation for Reading	14
Emergent Literacy	20
The Nature of Written English	21
The Goals of Reading Instruction	25
A Comprehensive Curriculum of Reading Instruction	26
Other Important Considerations In a Comprehensive Curriculum	36
The Role of Library Media Specialists	39
The Role of Reading Specialists	40
Early Intervention with Children Experiencing Reading Difficulties	40

Section II

Abilities and Knowledge Needed By K-3 Teachers of Literacy	45
Children's Reading Competencies (K-3)	45
Using Assessment to Guide Instruction	59
Critical Indicators for Teacher Intervention (K-3)	62
Teacher Competencies for Effective Primary Reading Instruction	68
The Importance of High-Quality Preservice Teacher Education	81
The Need for Ongoing Professional Development	82
Conclusion	83
Glossary	84
References	87



Preface

Reading has been one of the most intensively researched areas of the past several decades. A great deal is now known about how children learn to read and about why some children experience reading difficulties. Despite some lingering controversies in the reading field, a broad consensus exists regarding the competencies involved in skilled reading, the experiences that influence the development of these abilities, and the basic components of effective reading instruction (e.g., National Academy of Education, 1985; National Reading Panel, 2000; National Research Council, 1998).

Relative to children in other states, children in Connecticut do extremely well on standardized reading tests; for example, Connecticut fourth graders outscored children from all other states on the 1998 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in reading. Moreover, the performance of Connecticut schoolchildren is not explained solely by the relatively high income and parental education levels in the state, but rather appears at least partly a function of educational policies (Baron, 1999).

However, even in Connecticut, there is still a great deal of room for improvement in reading achievement. Concerns have most often been raised about the reading achievement of poor children in urban school districts, and it is true that reading failure is especially common among poor children. Nevertheless, many middle-class and suburban children also experience reading failure. Whether or not children's reading difficulties are associated with poverty, with effective instruction and adequate resources the vast majority of children can learn to read well. Furthermore, reading achievement can be improved not only in low-achieving or at-risk youngsters, but also in middle- and high-achieving students. Thus, preventing reading failure and improving reading achievement are goals for all of Connecticut's children.

The Connecticut General Assembly has demonstrated its commitment to the goal of early reading success for children most in need of support. Specifically, in 1998-99, the General Assembly provided an additional \$20 million to urban and priority school districts 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. Further, the Connecticut General Assembly enacted Public Act 99-227, An Act Concerning a Statewide Early Reading Success Institute. This act included the development of an Early Reading Success Panel (1999-2000), an assessment of priority school districts' institutional and teacher needs related to reading success, and the development of a three-year in-service plan in the urban and priority districts that is based on the panel's recommendations.

The Early Reading Success Panel was composed of members from a wide range of constituencies involved in reading, including elementary school teachers, school administrators, reading specialists, librarians, special educators, bilingual educators, legislators, and early childhood and higher education experts knowledgeable in the field of reading research. Members of the panel began their work in January 2000. They worked with nationally recognized researchers and reviewed and discussed a wide range of research literature on reading. The charge of the panel was to identify the professional development required for teachers, school administrators and school librarians K-3, to be provided through the Early Reading Success Institute. This institute will use the recommendations of the reading panel and the identified needs from the previously mentioned assessment to provide professional development in urban and priority school districts.

Although the initial focus of the Early Reading Success Institute involves urban and priority school districts, it should be emphasized that this report is intended for **everyone** in Connecticut with an interest in early reading achievement, including parents and educators in all school districts, librarians, members of the business community, and indeed, all Connecticut citizens. Members of the panel hope that their recommendations not only will be of importance to the design and implementation of the Early Reading Success Institute, but also will define the qualities of good practice for the teaching of reading for all Connecticut educators. Further, they encourage parents and the community to consider their important roles in preparing children to read. Finally, they urge schools of education to consider these findings as they prepare teacher candidates to teach reading.

Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Early Reading Success Panel. Two main sections form the report. Section I provides a general overview of basic research findings about reading, including the nature of skilled reading, the competencies important in reading achievement, and the components of a comprehensive, high-quality curriculum of reading instruction. Section II specifies the competencies required for reading success for children in kindergarten through Grade 3, critical indicators for teacher intervention with children at each grade level and the competencies required of K-3 teachers. A glossary of important terms and a list of references are provided at the end of the report.

Section I of this report may be of particular interest to parents and the general public, while Section II will likely be of particular interest to educators. Neither section, however, is intended to stand alone. To gain a full understanding of the implications of this report, it must be read in its entirety.

Early Reading Success Panel

Theodore S. Sergi (Chairperson), Commissioner of Education
Marilyn Adams, Bolt, Beranick and Newmann, Cambridge, Mass.
Delia Bello-Davila, Hartford Public Schools
Bruce Brettschneider, Ellington Public Schools
Jeff Brohinsky, Hartford Public Schools
Donald Busca, Middletown Public Schools
Mary Anne Doyle, University of Connecticut
Lol Fearon, Salem Public Schools
Anne Fowler, Haskins Laboratories, New Haven
State Sen. Judith Freedman, Westport
State Sen. Thomas Gaffey, Meriden
State Rep. Nancy Kerensky, South Windsor
Pat Kleine, Eastern Connecticut State University
Roberta Kurlantzick, Farmington Public Schools
Evelyn LaFontaine, New Britain Public Schools
Lois Lanning, Connecticut Association for Reading Research, Torrington
Luci Leone, Connecticut Library Media Association, West Hartford
Theresa Lynch, Connecticut Reading Association, Prospect
Cathie Maher, Preston Public Schools
State Rep. Brian Mattiello, Torrington
Reginald Mayo, New Haven Public Schools
Daria Plummer, Connecticut Education Association, Hartford
Margaret Rick, Meriden Public Schools
Manola Schiavo, Branford Public Schools
Karen Serret, Waterbury Public Schools
Louise Spear-Swerling, Southern Connecticut State University
George Springer, Connecticut Federation of Educational and Professional Employees, Rocky Hill
State Rep. Cameron Staples, New Haven
Ann Terezakis, Learning Disabilities Association of Conn., Marlborough
Linda Williams, Connecticut State Library, Willimantic
Elaine Zimmerman, Connecticut Commission on Children, Hartford

Special Thanks To

Jean Klein, Connecticut Reading Association, Prospect
State Rep. Denise Merrill, Mansfield
Eleanor Osborne, New Haven Public Schools
Rose Marie Salafia, Hartford Public Schools
Kathie Stroh, Hartford Federation of Teachers

National Reading Experts Addressing Panel

Isabel L. Beck, Learning, Research and Development Center, University of
Pittsburgh
Linnea Ehri, Graduate School and University Center of the City University of
New York
Barbara Foorman, Center for Academic and Reading Skills, University of
Texas
Bill Honig, Consortium On Reading Excellence (CORE), California
Phyllis C. Hunter, State of Texas Reading Initiative
Katherine Mitchell, Alabama Department of Education
David Pearson, CIERA, Michigan State University
Joseph K. Torgesen, Florida State University
Joanna Williams, Teachers College, Columbia University

Staff

Betty J. Sternberg, Associate Commissioner of Education
Joan Boykoff Baron, education consultant, Storrs
Catherine Montagano, clerk of panel, Greenwich