

**LITERACY IS ESSENTIAL TO ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT AND
SUCCESS (LEADS)
A MIDDLE GRADES (4-8) LITERACY MODEL**

The New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Literacy has developed a middle grades literacy design: Literacy is Essential to Adolescent Development and Success (LEADS). The model is both student-centered and comprehensive. It was developed to address the concern related to the “middle grades drop-off” or the “fifth (now sixth) grade cliff” identified by national and state assessment data in literacy that show precipitous declines after grade four/five. To move toward the full implementation of this model, the New Jersey Department of Education has taken several steps:

- Conducted an exhaustive review of hundreds of studies and research articles on middle grades students and literacy
- Required that elements of the design be included in the middle grades classes in Abbott schools (see regulations for Abbott districts);
- Received a grant from the National Governors’ Association to develop state policy related to adolescent literacy, develop a training manual and disseminate information regarding the model to all districts in the state
- Developed a small scale pilot project in summer 2005 which involved three districts whose staff were trained to implement the model;
- Expanded the pilot project in summer 2006 to include eight districts and provided training to staff in these pilot districts to implement the model during the summer of 2006 and then into the regular 2006 – 2007 school year.
- Further expanded the pilot (summer 2007) to include another nine districts, bringing the total pilot districts to 17 (including Middletown). The pilot includes extensive and intensive professional development along with on-site support for pilot teachers as well as administrative share out meetings focused on curriculum development to support the model.

THE MODEL AND ITS CORE COMPONENTS

The following is a list and description of the topics to be included in the training as well as the core elements embedded in the model.

Overview of the LEADS Program

The LEADS model is research-based, student-centered, inclusive, and interdisciplinary. It is focused on supporting adolescent reading and writing instruction while connecting these skills to the content areas through a strong focus on expository reading and writing.

The Research

LEADS is based on unambiguous, universally accepted good instruction. It is about the student, what he/she needs to know to be successful in high school and beyond. It reviews 15 critical areas. For example, we know that vocabulary is critical to successful comprehension and reading. We know that memorization of disconnected words and their definitions is the least effective strategy for students to integrate vocabulary. LEADS embodies the work of noted national researcher Isabel Beck by stressing the importance of selecting vocabulary to be integrated from books that the students are reading. There is a need for multiple exposures in various content areas (see thematic planning) and multiple opportunities to use that vocabulary in meaningful ways (reading across the content areas, writing, oral presentations, projects). This is not a preferred way, but the universally accepted way. LEADS incorporates the highly successful strategy known as “Word Walls”.

There is no controversy or debate around these 15 features. There are many teachers who are not aware of the research and findings. This is an issue of educating the adults responsible for instructing middle grades students.

The 15 Features of LEADS

- 1. Direct, explicit comprehension instruction**, which is instruction in the strategies and processes that proficient readers use to understand what they read, including summarizing, keeping track of one’s own understanding, and a host of other practices
- 2. Effective instructional principles embedded in content**, including language arts teachers using content-area texts and content-area teachers providing instruction and practice in reading and writing skills specific to their subject area
- 3. Motivation and self-directed learning**, which includes building motivation to read and learn and providing students with the instruction and supports needed for independent learning tasks they will face after graduation
- 4. Text-based collaborative learning**, which involves students interacting with one another around a variety of texts
- 5. Strategic tutoring**, which provides students with intense individualized reading, writing, and content instruction as needed
- 6. Diverse texts**, which are texts at a variety of difficulty levels and on a variety of topics
- 7. Intensive writing**, including instruction connected to the kinds of writing tasks students will have to perform well in high school and beyond
- 8. A technology component**, which includes technology as a tool for and a topic of literacy instruction
- 9. Ongoing formative assessment of students**, which is informal, often daily assessment of

how students are progressing under current instructional practices

10. Extended time for literacy, which includes approximately two to four hours of literacy instruction and practice that takes place in language arts and content-area classes

11. Professional development that is both long term and ongoing

12. Ongoing summative assessment of students and programs, which is more formal and provides data that are reported for accountability and research purposes

13. Teacher teams, which are interdisciplinary teams that meet regularly to discuss students and align instruction

14. Leadership, which can come from principals and teachers who have a solid understanding of how to teach reading and writing to the full array of students present in schools

15. A comprehensive and coordinated literacy program, which is interdisciplinary and interdepartmental and may even coordinate with out-of-school organizations and the local community.

Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy

Dr. Michael Kamil of Stanford University and a member of the National Reading Panel (2001) and Dr. Diane August of the Center for Applied Linguistics and member of the National Literacy Panel (2004-5) served as the national consultants, advisors and reviewers of the state model. Fred Carrigg, former Special Assistant to the Commissioner for Literacy, New Jersey Department of Education (2002-2007) was the principal investigator for the National Governors' Association grant. All three were members of the national panel for Adolescent Literacy and ELLs (2005-2006).

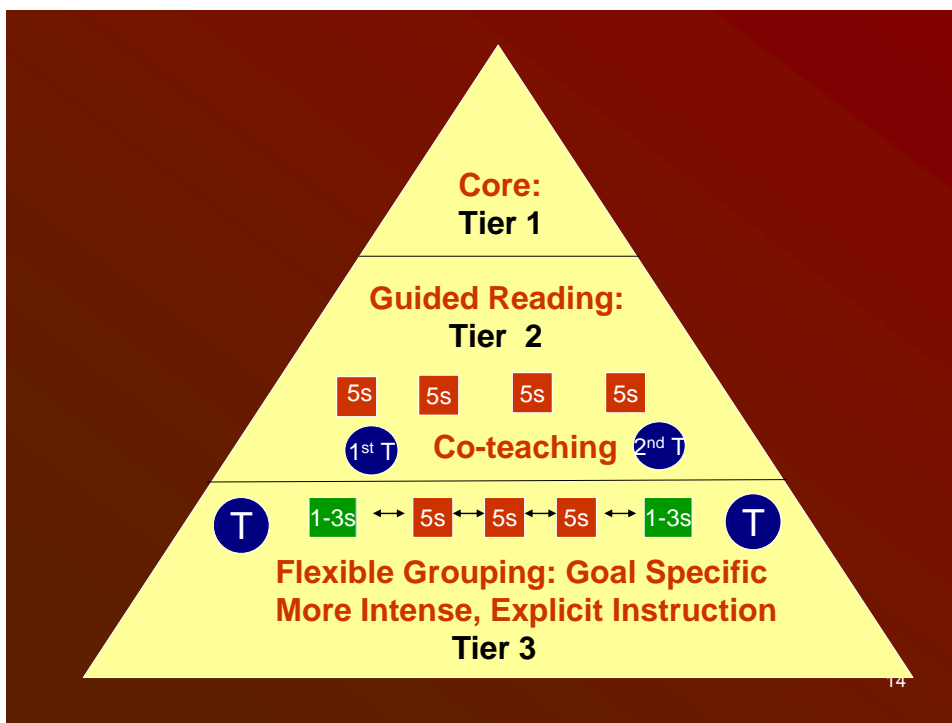
Classroom Implementation

The model incorporates the three tiers of instruction design. These three tiers of instruction include:

- Tier 1 – this component is to provide whole group instruction focused on developing higher order thinking skills. In New Jersey these are the core curriculum content standards (NJCCCS). Instruction in Tier 1 also focuses on developing and expanding students' vocabulary as well as background knowledge around which themes/units of study are built. All reading materials used in Tier 1 are age appropriate, grade level or above the instructional level, and **rigorous**, thereby assuring that all students are exposed to the core. This includes special education students who, based on the data, have too often been segregated in classes that exposed them to less than rigorous expectations.
- Tier 2 - this component of the model allows for teachers to provide small group instruction focused on providing scaffolded support to students to help them develop and extend reading comprehension skills that are modeled in Tier 1. All reading materials used at this level are at the students' **instructional** level. While students work with the teacher in small groups, their classmates are working independently on projects (PBLs), researching and using reading materials at their **independent** reading level, writing, doing reader responses, note taking, etc. It is a critical part of this component. New knowledge is best acquired in small groups with adult leadership and guidance. Some teachers have trouble planning

meaningful work for multiple small groups. This is a quality of instruction issue and may take more time with some teachers. However, advanced students have a right to remain advanced and receive more challenging work. Struggling readers have a right to be instructed at their appropriate level. LEADS does not retreat on this critical issue that instruction is about the students. No singular whole group planning meets the needs of all students.

- Tier 3 – this component again allows for teachers to provide individual or small group instruction focused on **interventions** to support struggling readers. Instruction is to help those students who are two or more years below level master specific skills that they have not mastered or that form gaps in their repertoire of reading skills.



Additionally this overview touches on integrated, content-based thematic planning, and engages students in project-based learning.

Thematic Planning

The LEADS model is built around thematic, cross-curricular units. The core reading materials, novels and expository/informational text, set the theme for the unit. These core reading materials also form the base of tier 1 instruction. Guided reading materials then mirror the core reading materials and are based around the theme. Finally, while the teacher is working with small groups of students providing Tier 2 and 3 instruction, students not receiving direct instruction from the teacher at that time engage in project-based learning (PBL).

Districts are urged to choose themes that are broad enough to plan daily instruction for a marking period and that are deep enough to allow for projects that are rich and engaging and that focus on the development of content understanding. As participants focus attention on selection of appropriate materials for guided reading, they are encouraged to include both novel-based/ literature selections as well as expository texts. Research materials that students will refer to when working on PBLs include on-line resources as well as texts.

In Middletown, a Middle Grades Interdisciplinary Curriculum Committee began work in early July, 2007. The committee began by reviewing the available 8th grade data to determine needs and goals based on improving academic progress in the middle grades, specifically in the area of language arts. We used the standard NJDOE measure of comparative group and subskill analyses. The consensus was that new curricula should emphasize both improved numbers in the advanced proficient category and a strong emphasis on intervening with struggling readers through an inclusive model.

The committee then set about reviewing the existing 3 guides, Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science, to determine points of mutual content and topics. Interdisciplinary power standards were identified for spiral inclusion across the grades. It was agreed that we would follow the Social Studies chronology as much as possible since LAL can work in most frameworks and Science, with its modular format, allows for more flexibility. A format for the new guide was agreed upon and the detailed work of building a new interdisciplinary curriculum was begun.

The decision was made to develop a “choice” curriculum for teachers in the area of novels/books to be read by students to assure the widest possible buy-in by staff. Each unit would have 6 to 8 core novels at 3 levels of proficiency, slightly behind grade level, at grade level, and slightly above, to address the academic levels of the students. In addition, 6-8 guided reading novels and/or other authentic materials were selected. That is, for each unit, the committee would recommend a minimum of 12 books in addition to aligning the guides to current texts in the 3 content areas. To select 12 novels that were authentic readings for a unit, committee members often read more than 20 books. Each recommended book has been read and recommended by at least 2 committee members, often 3. Novel selection cannot be taken lightly. The process for building an interdisciplinary curriculum is very different than selecting a publisher’s series and then aligning the chapters to state standards.

Student Assessment/ Progress Monitoring and Intervention

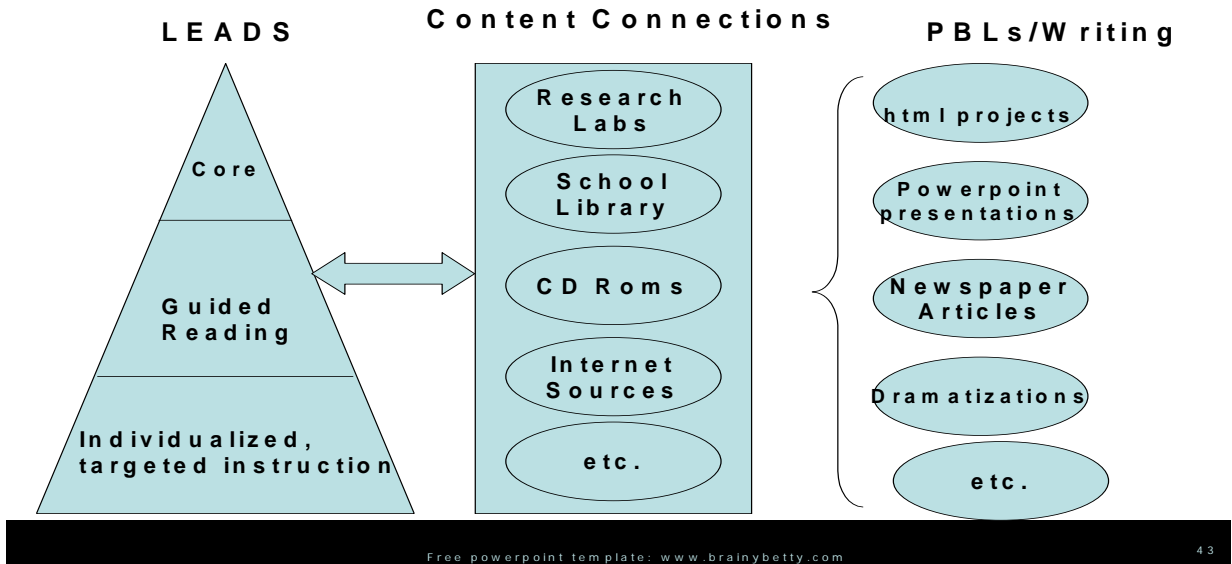
Teachers and administrators are guided to use assessment data to guide instruction. This includes the use of screening instruments (DRA2) and interpretation of results to identify students’ guided reading levels and possible areas for intervention in Tier 3. Also, teachers are advised to record on-going assessments to map daily instruction; this includes running records as well as anecdotal records during guided reading.

Clearly, as the data show, some students enrolled at these levels have not mastered essential reading skills. Not all students have developed the requisite late decoding skills needed to read effectively, nor do all students have the vocabulary needed to help them make sense of the decoding process. Additionally, the necessary background knowledge and skills may not be in place among English Language Learners (ELLs) to facilitate the development of key reading and writing skills. Teachers must become aware of strategies needed to assure that students develop these skill sets to the appropriate levels to enable them to become strong readers.

Project Based Learning/ Organizing & Managing the Block

Projects (Project Based Learning) allow students to access a variety of texts to learn more about the topics related to the theme. While working on projects, students work in cooperative learning groups or independently research the information needed for their project. Students are assigned both short-term and long-term projects on which they are graded. They are also asked to report out on their topics to their peers who are held responsible for knowing about their classmates' topics. Projects reflect the core curriculum content standards of the subject area, e.g. social studies or science. They should challenge while enabling the student to become an independent learner. Alvermann and others have stressed the importance of "re-engaging the disengaged" learners. Project-based learning helps meet this goal.

Organizing and managing the literacy block is critical to the success of any program. Teachers learn how to plan for each tier of instruction, skills they may not have developed if trained or formerly seen as "English" teachers. They also need to know how to plan short and long-term projects that engage the students. While students are working independently and in their cooperative reading groups, teachers can meet with small groups of students and direct instruction to their specific learning needs. This is a relatively new approach for some middle grades teachers, yet a critical one for the success of the program.



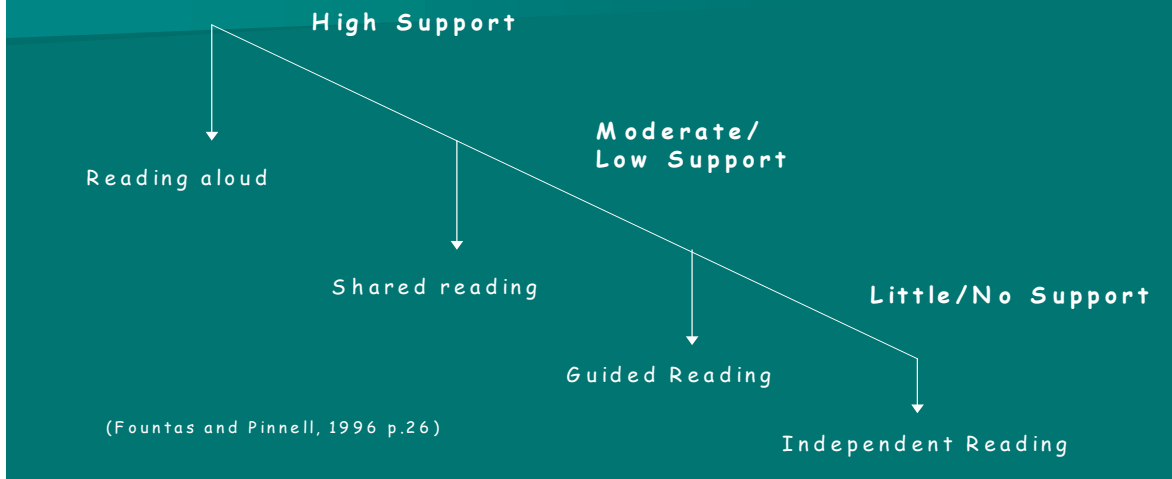
In Middletown, a major effort is already in place with the IDEPortal. Many teachers have already been trained, and every secondary teacher has an individual subscription to an electronic library of PBLs' organized by topic, referencing the subject areas and grade ranges. Math teachers have been involved in a process of change for several years now – extensive use of cooperative learning, investigations, problem solving, etc. The extension of these practices to the Humanities compliments the district vision of a student-centered, inquiry based paradigm shift.

Guided Reading and Expository Reading Strategies

Guided reading is small group reading instruction that is focused at students' instructional level and designed to scaffold instruction, thereby moving students from their current reading level to the next higher level. The initial level for guided reading is determined by the initial student screening assessment and then based on daily interaction in small groups. Teachers track student progress through anecdotal records and running records on the students. The key purpose of this instruction is to develop comprehension strategies. To plan the guided reading lesson, teachers must know students reading level, the strategy they want to reinforce (the strategy should be modeled during Tier 1, through a read aloud and think aloud) and pose guiding questions to focus students' attention and give them a purpose for reading.

Expository reading is very different from reading narrative text; therefore teachers in the middle grades need to help students develop new reading strategies for reading expository text. A few of these include skimming and scanning, reading charts and other data presentations, etc. and comprehension aids so that they can read these texts with full comprehension.

Scaffolding Instruction



Process Writing & Short and Long Term Projects

To prepare both long and short term projects, students need to be able to write for a variety of purposes, so writing must be integrated across the model. Teachers model writing during Tier 1, conference with students during Tier 2. They assign short-term projects, preparatory to long-term assignments. Teachers will ask students to look up and organize information. Graphic organizers, etc. are tools that teachers can share with students to help them organize information and write on their topic. Teachers use “Writing Workshop” and conferencing with students to support the on-going development of their writing skills.

Analyzing Data

Today we hear so much about data driven decision-making; yet many educators are not fully aware of how powerful student assessment data can be and how it can inform their daily instructional practices. Together, teams from the district gather, organize, and review data to help identify trends in their district and schools, as well as areas for focus and instruction. Teams look at subgroup performance as well as subtest performance. Those subgroups that are not performing well are targeted for focused instruction based on current research. Subcluster performance analysis of the state assessments helps identify whether or not schools and districts are offering a balanced literacy program. Or if they need to refocus on a particular area, i.e. reading vs. writing. Use of data helps school teams identify areas that demand their attention in the schools and plan programs and services accordingly.

Where are we in Middletown?

Many teachers attended the summer trainings. Many are now implementing various components of LEADS at their personal “comfort” levels. Many teachers are moving forward quickly. There are classes and teachers that have achieved high levels of implementation. Their students are engaged, enthralled by their books and the content of their subject areas. Classes have 30 or more academic vocabulary words on their word walls. Sophisticated teachers have multiple word walls. Students are writing meaningful, rigorous essays that connect learning to self and current life. Exemplary teachers are modeling, scaffolding, forming small, instructional-level guided reading groups. Some have even begun to identify tier 3 small group interventions.

Final Words

LEADS is not a program. It is not a series of books. LEADS is good instruction, based on an exhaustive review of the body of existing research on a national level that won NJ the only National Governors’ Association Planning Award Grant for Middle Grades (January 2006).

LEADS honors teaching and the devotion of teachers to their vocation and their dedication to children. It supports teaching and the profession by affirming that all teachers wish to inspire and challenge all children to succeed at the highest levels possible.

Research

Alvermann, D.E. (2001). *Effective literacy instruction for adolescents*. Executive Summary and paper commissioned by the National Reading Conference. Chicago, IL:National Reading Conference.

August, D., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). Executive Summary: Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth. *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Backes, J., Ralston, A., & Ingwolson, G. (1999). Middle level reform: The impact on student achievement. *Research in Middle Level Education Quarterly* 22(3): 43-57.

Bangert-Drowns, R.L., Hurley, M.M., & Wilkinson, B. (2004). The effects of school-based writing-to-learn interventions on academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research* 74(1): 29-58.

Beck, I.L., McKeown, McKeown, M., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction*. New York: Guilford Press.

Biancarosa, C., & Snow, C. E. (2006). *Reading Next—A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy: A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

Biemiller, A. (2003). Vocabulary: Needed if more children are to read well. *Reading Psychology* 24, 323-335.

Birman, B.F., Desimone, L., Porter, A.C., & Garet, M.S. (2000). Designing professional development that works. *Educational Leadership* 57(8): 28-33.

Blachowicz, C. & Fisher, P. (2000). Vocabulary instruction. In M. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, P.D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research* (Vol. 111). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Black, P., & William, D. (1998a). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education* 5(1): 7-74.

Blumenfeld, P., Fishman, B.J., Krajcik, J., Marx, R.W., & Soloway, E. (n.d.). Creating usable innovations in systemic reform: Scaling-up technology-embedded project-based science in urban schools. *Educational Psychologist*, 35, 149-164.

Carrigg, F., Honey, M., & Thorpe, R. (2005). Moving from successful local practice to effective state policy. In C. Dede, J.P. Honan, & L.C. Peters (Eds.), *Scaling up success* (pp. 1-26). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Carrigg, F., & Kurabinski, M.J. (2005, September). *The Role of Comparative Data in Changing the Educational Reform Conversation*. Paper presented at the meeting at Wingspread sponsored by EDC's Center for Children and Technology.

Deshler, D., Shumaker, J.B., & Woodruff, S.K. (2004). Improving literacy skills of at-risk adolescents: A schoolwide response. In D.S. Strickland & D.E. Alvermann (Eds.), *Bridging the literacy achievement gap: Grades 4-12* (pp.86-106). New York: Teachers College Press.

Englert, C.S., & Tarrant, K.L. (1995). Creating collaborative cultures for educational change. *Remedial and Special Education* 16:325-36, 353.

Flowers, N., Mertens, S.B., & Mulhall, P.F. (1999). The impact of teaming: Five research-based outcomes. *Middle School Journal* 31(2): 57-60.

Fountas, I.C., & Pinnell, G.S. (1996). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children*. Portsmouth, NJ: Heinemann.

Frey, N. (2002). Literacy achievement in an urban middle-level professional development school: A learning community at work: *Reading Improvement* 39(1): 3-13.

Fuchs, L.S., Deno, S.L., & Mirkin, P.K. (1984). The effects of frequent curriculum-based measurement and evaluation on pedagogy, student achievement, and student awareness of learning. *American Educational Research Journal* 21(440-60).

Fuchs, L.S., Fuchs, D., Hamlett, C.L., Phillips, N.B., & Bentz, J. (1994). Classwide curriculum-based measurement: Helping general educators meet the challenge of student diversity. *Exceptional Children* 60(6): 518-37.

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007) Writing Next—Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools: A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York. Washington, DC: Alliance for Education

Guthrie, J.T. & Davis, M.H. (2003). Motivating struggling readers in middle school through an engagement model of classroom practice. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 19(1), 59-85.

Guthrie, J.T., & Humenick, N.M. (2004). Motivating students to read: Evidence for classroom practices that increase reading motivation and achievement. In P. McCardle and V. Chhabra, (Eds.). *The voice of evidence in reading research* (pp. 329-54). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

Guthrie, J.T., Wigfield, A., & Perencevich, K.C. (2004). *Motivating reading comprehension: Concept-oriented reading instruction*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Hirsh, E.D. (2006, Spring). *Building knowledge: The case for bringing content into the language arts block and for a knowledge-rich curriculum core for all children*. Retrieved 4/10/06 http://www.aft.org/pubsreports/american_educator/issues/spring06/hirsch.htm

Hock, M.F., Deshler, D.D. & Schumaker, J.B. (2000). *Strategic Tutoring*. Lawrence, KS: Edge Enterprises.

Hock, M.F. & Deshler, D.D. (2003). Adolescent Literacy: Ensuring that no adolescent is left behind. *Principal Leadership* 13(4).

International Reading Association, *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches*. (2006). New York: Carnegie Corporation.

Kamil, M.L. (2003). Adolescents and literacy: Reading for the 21st century. *Alliance for Excellent Education*.

Kamil, M.L., Intrator, S., & Kim, H.S. (2000). Effects of other technologies on literacy and literacy learning. In M.Kamil, P. Mosenthal, P.D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research* vol. 3 (pp. 771-90). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- King, A. (2002). Structuring peer interaction to promote-high level cognitive processing. *Theory and Practice* 41(1): 33-39.
- Konopak, B.C., Martin, S.H., & Martin, M.A. (1990). Using a writing strategy to enhance sixth-grade students' comprehension of content material. *Journal of Reading Behavior* 22:19-37.
- Lee, V.E., & Smith, J.B. (1996). Collective responsibility for learning and its effects on gains in achievement for early secondary school students. *American Journal of Education* 104(2): 103-47.
- Lenz, B.K., and Deshler, D.D. (2003). *Teaching content to all: Evidence-based inclusive practices in middle and secondary schools*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Marks, H.M., & Printy, S.M. (2003). Principal leadership and school performance: An integration of transformational and instructional leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly* 39(3): 370-97
- Mason, L. (1998). Sharing cognition to construct scientific knowledge in school context: The role of oral and written discourse. *Instructional Science* 26: 359-89.
- Muijs, D., & Harris, A. (2003). Teacher leadership- improvement through empowerment? An overview of the literature. *Educational Management and Administration* 31(4): 437-48.
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Teaching children to read: The report of the National Reading Panel*. Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health.
- Newell, G.E., & Winograd, P. (1995). Writing about and learning from history texts: The effects of task and academic ability. *Research in the Teaching of English* 29(2): 133-63.
- O'Connor, R.E., Bell, K.M., Harty, K.R., Larkin, L.K., Sackor, S.M., & Zigmond, N. (2002). Teaching reading to poor readers in the intermediate grades: A comparison of text difficulty. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 94(3): 474-85.
- Palincsar, A.S., & Herrenkohl, L.R. (2002). Designing collaborative learning contexts. *Theory into Practice* 41(1): 26-32
- RAND Reading Study Group. (2002). *Reading for understanding: Toward an R&D program in reading comprehension*. Santa Monica, CA:RAND.
- Shanahan, T. (2004). Improving reading achievement in secondary schools: Structures and reforms. In D.S. Strickland & D.E. Alvermann (Eds.). *Bridging the literacy achievement gap grades 4-12* (pp. 43-55). New York: Teachers College Press.

Smith, M.W., & Wilhelm, J. (2002). *“Reading don’t fix no Chevys”: Literacy in the lives of young men*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Spraker, J. (2003). *Teacher teaming in relation to student performance: Findings from the literature*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

SREB: Getting Students Ready for College-preparatory/Honors English: *What Middle Grades Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do*, Southern Regional Education Board, 592 10th St. N.W., Atlanta, GA 30318; www.sreb.org

Tatum, A.W. (2005). *Teaching reading to black adolescent males: Closing the achievement gap*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Tierney, R., & Shanahan, T. (1991). Reading-writing relationships: Processes, transactions, outcomes. In P.D. Pearson, R. Barr, M. Kamil, & P. Mosenthal (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research* (Vol. 11). New York: Longman.

Torgesen, J. (2005a). *Essential features of effective reading instruction for struggling readers in grades 4-12*. Presentation for the Utah Branch, International Dyslexia Association.

Torgesen, J. (2005b). *Recommendations for actions to accelerate the reading development of struggling readers in Florida’s middle schools*. A report for the Governor’s Reading Advisory Council. Florida: Florida Center for Reading Research.

Torgesen, J. (2004, Fall). Avoiding the devastating downward spiral. *American Educator*, 6-47.

Torgesen, J. (2005b). *Recommendations for actions to accelerate the reading development of struggling readers in Florida’s middle schools*. A report for the Governor’s Reading Advisory Council. Florida: Florida Center for Reading Research.

William, D., & Black, P. (1996). Meanings and consequences: A basis for distinguishing formative and summative functions of assessment?” *British Educational Research Journal* 22(5): 537-48.

Wren, S. (n.d.). *A school-improvement plan for older struggling readers*. Retrieved March 26, 2006 from <http://www.balancedreading.com/blog.html>

Fred Carrigg
Interim District Director of Curriculum and Instruction
for the Humanities, K-12
Middletown Public Schools
(732) 787-1220 x7785