Marshall Street

# Conclusion

## TURNING THE PAGE TO SECONDARY LITERACY

A collection of research-to-impact practices developed with the Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities

# Conclusion

Readiness for college and career in the twenty-first century requires the development of a broad set of competencies ranging from critical thinking to information, media, and technology literacy to communication and collaboration. Reading proficiency is not only a necessary contributor to the development of these skills, but it is also correlated with educational and life outcomes, including high school completion, employment and earning potential, and physical and social-emotional well-being. Schools must do more than prepare some students for college and career in the twenty-first century; they must ensure that all students are equipped with the competencies needed to succeed in their post-secondary lives.

The aim of the Marshall Street Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities (NIC) is to systematically improve the way our education system serves those furthest from these opportunities with a focus on Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty. Within this work, one challenge is clear: students within our priority population are not developing the reading skills necessary to support twenty-first-century college and career readiness. Addressing low reading proficiency rates poses unique problems for secondary educators. First, nonproficient secondary readers are a particularly heterogeneous group who differ greatly in both the degree and the nature of their reading difficulties. This broad range of student needs necessitates an equally wide range of interventions, an approach that is often missing in the “one-size-fits-all” reading intervention provided in many secondary settings. Traditional assessment systems and practices in secondary settings fail to illuminate individual student reading profiles, limiting schools’ ability to align interventions with student needs. Effective reading intervention in the secondary setting depends on educators who understand how reading develops, are knowledgeable about language and literacy constructs, implement evidence-based instructional practices, and are proficient with using assessment data to drive instructional planning. Yet, secondary educators report feeling woefully unprepared by both preservice training and in-service professional development to address students’ wide range of reading needs. These structural challenges are compounded by the reality that secondary students who don’t read well have often experienced years of reading failure, contributing to low motivation to read.



Over the course of three years, the NIC, a group of 10 public charter school networks serving more than 75,000 students nationwide, identified and piloted various best practices for improving outcomes for our priority population. This collection — itself an outcome of the work these schools accomplished — highlights the strongest and most promising of the practices implemented with the goal of improving reading proficiency. It details four best practices: **Guiding Literacy Interventions Through Tiered Assessment, Repeated Reading: Building Oral Reading Fluency in Secondary Readers, Developing Multisyllabic Word Reading Skills in Adolescent Readers,** and **Strengthening Timely Interventions through Goal Setting and Progress Monitoring**. It concludes with a case study showcasing an ongoing, responsive approach to developing educator capacity to implement evidence-based practices for secondary reading intervention, and a guidance document for school and district leaders on assessing adolescent readers.

## Four principles guided the approach taken by schools within the NIC:

- First, schools understood that effective secondary reading intervention had to be driven by **data-based decision-making**. Recognizing that traditional "one-size-fits-all" reading intervention driven by the availability of commercial programs has consistently failed to serve students in the target population adequately, NIC educators worked to select valid and reliable assessments to identify and understand nonproficient readers within their communities, develop decision-making criteria and protocols to systematically plan interventions, and strategically align interventions with individual student reading profiles.
- Second, schools in the NIC committed to the implementation of **evidence-based practices in secondary reading intervention**. The problem is not that we don't know how to serve secondary students with reading skill deficits; in fact, "...enough is already known about adolescent reading – both the nature of the problems of struggling readers and the types of interventions and approaches needed to address these needs – in order to act immediately on a broad scale."[1] Educators within the NIC continually worked to align their efforts with the best practice recommendations from the field of research on secondary reading intervention.
- Third, our approach to secondary reading intervention maintained a **focus on meaningful access to and participation in rigorous, grade-level academics**. As schools worked to address the needs of students with foundational reading skill gaps, their work was guided by the "north star" of grade-level content and texts. As such, NIC educators worked to integrate reading intervention within core, general education curriculum and courses and, even in pull-out intervention models, to leverage grade-level texts and content for instruction.
- Finally, the NIC's approach to secondary reading intervention included a **commitment to responsive, ongoing educator professional development.** The professional learning opportunities provided to educators within the NIC were similarly driven by evidence-based best practice recommendations from the field of research on adult learning and served to connect the driving principles of our approach to secondary reading intervention for teachers and leaders.

[1] Biancarosa, Gina, and Catherine E. Snow. 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.

The work driven by these guiding principles and highlighted across this collection has improved student outcomes and meaningfully impacted both students and educators within the NIC. At **Green Dot Public Schools**, the majority of students who participated in a supplemental repeated reading intervention planned through the tiered assessment process increased their oral reading fluency, with half of the students increasing fluency rates by over 30%. Students with IEPs who participated in the repeated reading protocol implemented in a co-taught World History class at **Noble Schools** made growth in reading proficiency rates commensurate with students without IEPs, and **Uncommon** students who received reading intervention consisting of several evidence-based practices for secondary readers increased reading fluency rates by an average of 20 correct words per minute over the course of a school year.

These results are not minor; because of the strong correlation between reading fluency and reading comprehension, the improvements mean that students are on the path to independent meaning-making of grade-level texts. Educators also experienced lasting benefits from the practices implemented within the NIC, with those who participated in the Professional Learning Community and individual coaching structures consistently reporting that these opportunities increased their capacity to implement evidence-based practices.

## Key Takeaways

### ADOLESCENCE IS NOT TOO LATE TO INTERVENE.

As members of the NIC engaged in the work of continually planning, implementing, evaluating, and refining their approaches to secondary reading intervention, they learned that this work can result in meaningful benefits for secondary learners and educators. They documented meaningful improvements in students' reading proficiency rates and attitudes toward reading and reported increased educator capacity to implement the practices that are most likely to lead to these results. Given the role of reading proficiency as a critical contributor to positive postsecondary outcomes, a key takeaway of this work is that investing in these practices has the potential to yield life-changing impacts for the NIC's target population.

### EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENTS AND DATA ANALYSIS PRACTICES PROVIDE THE ROADMAP FOR DESIGNING GAP-CLOSING READING INTERVENTION PROGRAMMING IN THE SECONDARY SETTING.

Like all secondary education systems, members of the NIC implemented mechanisms for collecting student data long before engaging in the Networked Improvement Community. However, as they began the work of refining their approaches to reading intervention, they learned that they weren't always collecting the *right* information, nor did they have in place the decision-making processes necessary for effective intervention planning. Members of the NIC recognized that closing persistent reading gaps for secondary students requires targeted and specific interventions and the ability to pivot quickly when an intervention is no longer needed or isn't yielding the expected results. This required an evaluation of current assessment practices and a willingness to reimagine or replace current approaches with the goal of developing systems that allowed them to know which students weren't reading proficiently, what specific areas of reading to address for those students, and how those students were responding to the interventions provided.

### SECONDARY READING INTERVENTION DOES NOT HAVE TO EXIST IN A SILO.

Many schools within the NIC had structures for providing reading intervention to students; however, these approaches were generally characterized by standalone, non-credit-bearing courses driven by commercially available programs. This approach failed to result in students transferring skills to grade-level academic texts and content and contributed to low engagement and motivation from students who had difficulty connecting the work of these classes to broader academic programs and goals. Members of the NIC experimented with embedding and aligning reading intervention within grade-level content, texts, and learning goals and learned that this approach yielded benefits. Leveraging core, general education content as the bedrock around which reading intervention was designed contributed to less social stigma for students receiving intervention, improved comprehension of grade-level content and/or texts, and increased collaboration between general and special education teachers for members of the NIC.

### SECONDARY EDUCATORS WANT TO AND CAN DEVELOP THE KNOWLEDGE AND COMPETENCIES NECESSARY TO EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS THE RANGE OF READING NEEDS THAT PRESENT IN THEIR CLASSROOMS.

Educators within the NIC reported similar experiences and concerns to those that the larger field of secondary educators has reported; namely, that they felt unprepared by their preservice and in-service professional development opportunities to teach nonproficient secondary readers. While the challenge of equipping teachers with the knowledge and competencies necessary to effectively intervene with nonproficient secondary readers may seem daunting, members of the NIC learned that it is possible. Responsive and collaborative professional learning grounded in evidence-based practices and coupled with individualized coaching to assist educators with implementation led to increased knowledge and skill in just one academic year.

## The four chapters, case study, and guidance document in this collection lay out the key components of effective secondary reading intervention.

Together, these components set the stage for addressing the diverse needs of nonproficient secondary readers while simultaneously growing the capacity of the educators who serve them. The participating members of the NIC found that, as they developed their capacity to implement evidence-based practices for nonproficient secondary readers, student learning outcomes increased at a greater rate. However, It is a misconception that these components cannot be implemented until each is carefully manicured and perfected. Instead, we urge school and system leaders to start *now*. Each school system has different needs, but prioritizing reading intervention will result in improved student outcomes, more meaningful participation in core academic programming for students with disabilities, and increased educator efficacy.