Marshall Street

Overview

TURNING THE PAGE TO SECONDARY LITERACY

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

COLLECTION OVERVIEW

Turning the Page to Secondary Literacy

Collection Introduction

The Challenge

Reading proficiency correlates strongly with educational attainment and broader life outcomes.

Proficient reading and writing skills contribute to a wide range of life outcomes, affecting an individual's academic achievement, career opportunities, earning potential, and physical and social-emotional well-being. While adequate literacy skills have far-reaching positive effects on individuals and society, low literacy rates have equally impactful consequences. Individuals with poor reading skills are more likely to drop out of school[1] and to be incarcerated.[2] They are less likely to obtain employment,[3] to earn an above-average salary, and to receive promotions at work.[4] They also have higher reported rates of depression and anxiety.[5]

Secondary students with disabilities are not developing the reading skills necessary to support college and career readiness.

On the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress assessment:

16%

of Black 8th grade students and

21%

of Hispanic 8th grade students scored within the proficient range in reading, compared to **38% of white students**

9%

of 8th grade students with disabilities scored within the proficient range in reading, compared to **34% of students without disabilities**

Because low reading skills are a barrier to accessing grade-level content and standards, this reality results in inequitable access to the rigorous academic content students need to engage with to be prepared for postsecondary success.

The diverse needs of nonproficient secondary readers pose unique challenges for schools.

Schools and districts seeking to improve reading outcomes of nonproficient secondary readers face several unique challenges:

SECONDARY READERS ARE A PARTICULARLY HETEROGENEOUS GROUP.

They can differ greatly, not only in the degree of their reading difficulties but also in the nature of those difficulties. They also tend to have difficulty with more than one aspect of reading.

THIS RANGE OF UNDERLYING CAUSES OF READING DIFFICULTIES NECESSITATES AN EQUALLY BROAD RANGE OF INTERVENTIONS.

However, reading intervention in middle and high school settings has often represented a "one-size-fits-all" approach, with one intervention available to all students reading below grade level, regardless of their individual reading profiles.

OUR TRADITIONAL ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS AREN'T DESIGNED TO ILLUMINATE THESE INDIVIDUAL READING PROFILES.

Commonly administered assessments at the secondary level often tell us which students are failing to meet grade-level reading benchmarks and standards. However, without a tiered approach that includes diagnostic assessment, we have little insight into why those students aren't reading proficiently.

SECONDARY STUDENTS WHO DON'T READ WELL HAVE HAD MANY YEARS TO DEVELOP SELF-CONCEPTS AS POOR READERS.

Reading is often effortful and laborious for them, and as a result, they read a significantly smaller volume of text than their peers who are reading proficiently. These factors contribute to an overall low motivation to read.

Why "Nonproficient Readers"?

Students with reading skills that fall below age- or grade-level expectations are often referred to as "struggling readers." This phrase represents deficit language that has the potential to perpetuate low expectations and reinforce biases. The authors of this collection have intentionally chosen to avoid this terminology and instead refer to students who are not yet reading at age- or grade-level expectations as "nonproficient readers." We hope this language will adequately describe the subgroup of students that is the focus of this collection while promoting respectful and inclusive dialogue.

A research-to-practice gap means that secondary educators are not equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to improve outcomes for nonproficient secondary readers.

The problem is not a paucity of research findings on reading intervention for older students. In fact, leading reading researchers stated in a 2006 report that "...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."[6]

The reality is that secondary teachers simply haven't been equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to implement evidence-based instruction for nonproficient readers. They consistently report that both teacher preparation programs and job-embedded professional development opportunities fail to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to address reading deficits for this population.[7]

> **"It is both fascinating and frustrating that, despite what can only be described as incredible advances in the broad and interdisciplinary field of reading and literacy research, coupled with progress in both education policy and practice...Black and Brown children have yet to benefit in sustainable, replicable, and transformative ways. Despite its promise, the science of reading is not benefiting Black and Brown children at scale."**
>
> **DR. NICOLE PATTON TERRY, PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR, FLORIDA CENTER FOR READING RESEARCH[8]**

Our Approach

Given the importance of reading proficiency to individuals' long-term outcomes, the reality of the current state of reading proficiency in our schools, and the complexity of teaching nonproficient secondary readers, the implementation of effective reading interventions is essential to the NIC's aim of systematically improving the way our education system serves Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty. To close the research-to-practice gap, the NIC explored and developed a set of accessible and effective interventions for secondary readers. At the foundation of these interventions are the following guiding principles.

Effective secondary reading intervention is driven by data-informed decision-making.

Schools within the NIC understood that to design and implement effective reading interventions, they first needed to understand the needs of the nonproficient readers within their systems. Thus, our approach started with universal screening of reading proficiency. That is, NIC schools first administered assessments to all students to identify those who were not yet reading proficiently.

While universal screening of reading proficiency is a relatively common practice in secondary schools, it is often the only systematic assessment practice implemented in these settings. Because of the heterogeneity of nonproficient secondary readers, simply identifying students reading below grade-level expectations is insufficient for developing interventions that are likely to result in gap-closing growth. As such, our approach also included diagnostic assessment, or a process of administering additional, targeted reading measures to uncover the specific skill deficits contributing to low reading proficiency for students identified via the universal screening process. By identifying the specific needs of nonproficient readers, schools within the NIC could develop menus of reading interventions that targeted students' specific reading needs.

Exemplifying this commitment to data-informed decision-making, **Green Dot Public Schools** leveraged a computer-based, adaptive measure of reading proficiency to identify students reading below an established cut point. They then administered curriculum-based measurements of reading fluency to this group of students. Analyzing the data from this fluency assessment allowed them to subdivide the nonproficient students into three subgroups:

- Students who had not yet developed proficient word recognition skills
- Students who could recognize words but lacked the reading fluency necessary for reading comprehension
- Students with adequate reading fluency but low language comprehension skills

Equipped with this comprehensive picture of reader profiles, Green Dot was able to tailor interventions to individual student needs.

Effective secondary reading intervention is aligned with evidence-based practices.

While many secondary schools implement some level of reading intervention for nonproficient readers, these approaches often fall short because (1) they represent a "one-size-fits-all" approach in which all students receive the same intervention regardless of their individual reading profiles, (2) they tend to focus narrowly on procedural reading skills without consideration of the conceptual and knowledge-based skills necessary for comprehension of grade-level secondary texts, and (3) they are driven by the availability of commercial intervention programs rather than the evidence-based practices that the field of reading science has established with respect to secondary reading intervention.

The NIC understood that accelerating reading proficiency for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty would require the implementation of practices that align with what works and what doesn't for our target population. The specific intervention practices implemented by schools within the NIC aligned with evidence-based practices that researchers consistently cite as critical to understanding and supporting nonproficient secondary readers. These practices include **multisyllabic word reading, reading fluency, and motivation and engagement.** In response to the recommendation that reading interventions at the secondary level are most effective when they target multiple subcomponents of reading, schools within the NIC sought to provide interventions that would address a range of reading needs rather than narrowly focusing on interventions designed to address isolated skills.

At **Uncommon Charter High School**, educators redesigned an existing reading intervention structure targeting 9th grade students to more comprehensively integrate evidence-based practices for nonproficient secondary readers. Diagnostic data indicated that students participating in the reading intervention course had specific skill deficits in multisyllabic word reading and reading fluency. Using this data, the Uncommon team developed a daily instructional protocol that leveraged grade-level texts to provide specific word study instruction, opportunities for repeated reading practice to build oral reading fluency, and explicit vocabulary instruction in high-leverage, academically relevant words. They paired this instructional protocol with strategies to build motivation and engagement, including student conferencing and collaborative goal setting.

Effective secondary reading intervention enables meaningful participation in rigorous, grade-level academics.

At many secondary schools, reading intervention is isolated from the core academic program, creating a structure that lessens its effectiveness. For example, students may participate in a reading intervention "class" that leverages a commercially available reading intervention program unrelated to core course content and texts. This lack of alignment contributes to low levels of skill generalization across contexts and creates barriers to providing inclusive services within general education classrooms. It can also diminish motivation as students struggle to see the applicability of the reading practice completed in reading intervention outside of that particular context.

Throughout the work of the NIC, it became clear that **effective, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive** reading intervention needed to keep participation in rigorous grade-level content as the north star. With this goal in mind, schools endeavored to align reading intervention efforts with the core academic program. For example, **Noble Schools** designed an oral reading fluency intervention that was facilitated by a special education and general education co-teaching pair within the context of a general education World History class. This approach resulted in several benefits for students, including reduced stigma associated with pull-out special education services, increased access to reading intervention for students who did not receive special education services, and improved reading comprehension of relevant academic texts.

Effective secondary reading intervention requires consistent, quality professional learning opportunities for educators.

Research shows that effective professional development is both intensive and sustained — teachers will learn a new skill well enough to positively impact student learning after approximately 50 hours of professional development. However, professional development delivered in US schools does not consistently align with these recommendations. A survey of US teachers designed to assess the current status of professional development revealed that most professional development fails to explore topics deeply and that nearly half of teachers are dissatisfied with their professional development opportunities.[9]

Secondary teachers report that, even when they are provided with opportunities to learn strategies to teach nonproficient readers, they rarely receive ongoing support. It comes as no surprise then, that they also report feeling woefully underprepared to teach reading to this population of students.[10]

To build the capacity of educators to implement secondary reading interventions, the NIC established a responsive, ongoing professional learning structure that included regular content-driven learning opportunities and individualized coaching. The approach was designed to align with the elements of effective professional development:[11]

- **It's content-focused:** Professional learning for schools within the NIC working to implement secondary reading intervention focused on discrete content related to evidence-based practices (e.g., supporting motivation and engagement in secondary readers, word study interventions, and vocabulary development).
- **It incorporates active learning:** Every professional learning opportunity provided to educators within the NIC included structures to promote reflection, meaning-making, and application to practice.
- **It supports collaboration:** Professional learning was structured via a professional learning community (PLC), which facilitated collaboration and connection across schools within the NIC.
- **It uses models of effective practice:** Participants in the NIC professional learning community had regular opportunities to observe instruction that aligned with evidence-based practices.
- **It is of sustained duration:** The PLC met monthly over the course of a full school year, with individual coaching sessions provided between PLC meetings.

> **"Explicitly teaching and leveraging the science allows us to overcome our blind spots, assumptions, and biases which impact every aspect of instruction. In other words, the quest to fortify our society and its institutions begins with preparing our teachers to apply the science of reading and reach all students. That's the way to save us from ourselves and avoid a permanent underclass filling our correctional institutions as prisoners of the 'reading wars.'"**
>
> KAREEM WEAVER, EDUCATION COMMITTEE, NAACP

Enabling Conditions

Each of the aforementioned principles contributed to improved experiences and reading outcomes for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty within the NIC. The effective implementation of these practices was made possible because of three core enabling conditions that were in place in NIC members' schools: assessment systems and practices, adaptive and flexible service schedules, and responsive, strategic development opportunities for educators. Without these three conditions, the practices' impact is dramatically reduced.

Assessment Systems and Practices

Effective secondary reading intervention is implemented within the context of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), which includes universal screening practices to identify students in need of intervention support, diagnostic assessment to pinpoint specific reading skill deficits, and ongoing monitoring of the reading progress of students participating in interventions. In addition to the assessment systems themselves, effective secondary reading intervention can only be achieved when schools implement collaborative structures in which educators regularly review data collected through screening, diagnostic, and progress-monitoring practices and leverage it to inform intervention decisions for students.

Schools in the NIC implemented a range of screening measures to identify subsets of their student populations who would require reading intervention to meaningfully participate in grade-level instruction and curriculum. They conducted diagnostic assessment to further pinpoint specific skill deficits for individual students and designed decision-making criteria to guide teams. With the belief that students should only participate in interventions as long as they need them, schools monitored student progress so that they could ensure students exited from interventions as skill deficits were remediated, or that they were referred for increasingly intensive levels of support if needed.

Adaptive and Flexible Service Schedules

Scheduling is often cited as a primary challenge in the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI) models in secondary settings.[12] Limiting reading intervention to a specific course offered within the context of students' schedules makes it difficult to return students to lower levels of support as skills are remediated. It also limits students' ability to engage in credit-bearing coursework, and it prevents educators from flexibly adjusting intervention dosage based on student need.

To address these challenges, schools within the NIC were flexible and adaptive in the design of reading intervention service schedules. For example, Green Dot Public Schools embedded an oral reading fluency intervention within an existing comprehensive reading course, while Noble Schools implemented a similar intervention within a co-taught general education World History course.

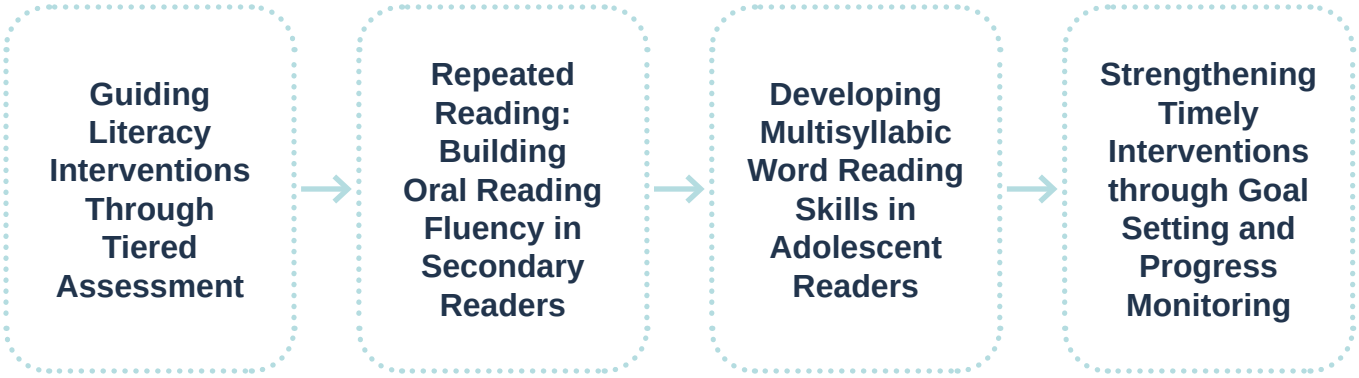
Responsive Development for Educators

Teacher knowledge of language and literacy constructs is associated with improved reading outcomes for students. Effective teachers of reading know the basics of reading development, understand language structure for both word recognition and language comprehension, apply evidence-based practices in their instruction, and use valid and reliable assessments to inform their teaching.[13] The majority of professional development experiences offered to educators fail to adequately develop this knowledge and these competencies, resulting in many secondary educators reporting feeling unprepared to address their students' needs as readers.

Eager to build their knowledge and skills related to language and literacy constructs and instruction, educators within the NIC participated in ongoing collaborative and responsive professional learning activities, including a regular professional learning community and individual coaching opportunities. These structures provided targeted, relevant content with immediate opportunities to apply learning, receive expert feedback, and revise approaches accordingly.

The Collection

This collection includes **four best practices** that schools in the NIC used to plan, implement, and monitor the effectiveness of secondary reading interventions, **one case study** of a professional learning community designed to build the capacity of NIC educators to use data to enhance these practices, and a **guidance document** for school and district leaders sharing considerations for the assessment of adolescent readers within an MTSS model.



Enabling Conditions:
Assessment Systems and Practices
Flexible Service Schedules
Responsive Development for Educators

The audience for this collection is educators, schools, and networks who believe that all students are capable of reaching reading proficiency levels that support meaningful participation in rigorous grade-level instruction, who fundamentally believe that it is the system's responsibility to ensure this is a reality for all students it serves, and who are looking for a roadmap to initiate or refine their approach to this work. While a great many research papers, reports, and technical assistance centers provide guidance in each of the areas described above, this collection is unique:

- It ties together the multiple elements critical to accelerating reading outcomes specifically for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty.
- Each chapter is grounded in both foundational and current research on the practice but emphasizes (1) detailed, real-world examples of the practice as implemented in secondary schools and classrooms within the NIC and (2) a step-by-step guide to implementation of the practice.

Chapter 1: Guiding Literacy Interventions Through Tiered Assessment

Tiered assessment to guide literacy intervention planning refers to the practice of identifying secondary students who are at risk of not meeting grade-level ELA benchmarks or standards, pinpointing specific reading skill gaps for these students, and planning aligned evidence-based interventions to address the identified skill gaps. This chapter outlines the individual steps involved in this process — (1) universal screening of reading, (2) diagnostic assessment of reading, and (3) alignment of evidence-based interventions to student needs — and provides guidance on the selection of assessments, development of decision-making criteria, and protocols for collaborative data-driven decision-making.

Chapter 2: Repeated Reading: Oral Reading Fluency Intervention for Secondary Readers

Oral reading fluency is highly correlated with reading comprehension, and schools that use a tiered assessment approach to guide literacy interventions will likely encounter a subgroup of students who lack the reading fluency necessary for reading comprehension. This chapter describes the implementation of repeated reading, an evidence-based practice for building oral reading fluency, across several settings within the NIC.

Chapter 3: Developing Multisyllabic Word Reading Skills for Secondary Readers

Weak word-analysis skills and inaccurate decoding of multisyllabic words are often key contributors to low reading fluency rates for nonproficient secondary readers. This chapter describes the implementation of a word study intervention designed to improve fluency and accuracy of multisyllabic word reading.

Chapter 4: Strengthening Timely Interventions through Goal Setting and Progress Monitoring

Effective implementation of secondary reading intervention requires establishing clear student goals, implementing valid and reliable assessments to monitor student progress toward those goals, and engaging in regular analysis of progress-monitoring data to guide instruction and intervention planning decisions. This chapter provides guidance on the selection of progress-monitoring tools and outlines a process for collecting data, conferencing with students, and analyzing data to inform intervention decisions.

Case Study: Enhancing Educator Capacity to Implement Evidence-Based Reading Interventions

Teacher knowledge of language and literacy constructs, implementation of evidence-based practices, and proficiency with assessments and data-based decision-making are all associated with improved student outcomes. Building these competencies requires practitioner-focused professional development and aligned coaching for educators. This case study highlights the approach taken by the Marshall improvement team to build the capacity of educators across the NIC working to implement secondary reading intervention through a professional learning community and individual coaching structures.

Guidance Document: How-To: Assessment of Adolescent Readers

This brief resource describes components of assessment and decision-making for adolescent readers for school and district leader consideration within an MTSS framework.

How to Approach this Collection

Readers of the collection should begin with chapter 1, as this chapter provides the framework for (1) identifying students within the system who will require intervention to reach grade-level ELA benchmarks and standards and (2) pinpointing the specific reading needs of those identified students for the ultimate purpose of aligning interventions to student need.

After chapter 1, readers are encouraged to learn about the specific evidence-based interventions aligned with student needs identified via the tiered assessment process. This collection includes chapters that clearly outline the implementation of interventions aligned with two specific components of proficient adolescent reading: oral reading fluency and multisyllabic word reading. However, as highlighted above, secondary readers often also present with needs in vocabulary and reading comprehension strategy use. While these components are not explicitly addressed in this collection, readers are encouraged to leverage the following resources as practical, research-aligned implementation guides:

Vocabulary: **Bringing Words to Life**
by Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, and Linda Kucan

Comprehension: **The Reading Comprehension Blueprint** by Nancy E. Hennessy, M.Ed.

In addition, the following resources provide comprehensive summaries of the research on secondary reading interventions:

Effective Instruction for Adolescent Struggling Readers: A Practice Brief
by Center on Instruction

Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices,
an IES Practice Guide

Interventions for Adolescent Struggling Readers: A Meta-Analysis with Implications for Practice by Center on Instruction

Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4–9
by What Works Clearinghouse

After identifying students, pinpointing their specific skill gaps, and aligning interventions accordingly, readers are encouraged to leverage chapter 4 to create a plan for engaging students in progress monitoring and the case study to plan for building teacher capacity.

Appendix

Notes

1 McArthur and Castles, “Helping Children with Reading Difficulties”

2 Mulcahy et al., “The Relationship Between Reading Age, Education and Life Outcomes”

3 Caspi et al., “Early Failure in the Labor Market”

4 Mulcahy et al., “The Relationship Between Reading Age, Education and Life Outcomes”

5 Ibid.

6 Biancarosa and Snow, *Reading Next*

7 Kamil et al., *Improving Adolescent Literacy*; Boardman et al., *Effective Instruction*

8 Terry, “Delivering on the Promise”

9 Darling-Hammond et al., *Professional Learning*

10 James-Burdumy et al., *Effectiveness of Selected Supplemental Reading Comprehension Interventions*

11 Darling-Hammond et al., *Professional Learning*

12 Ehren, “Response to Intervention in Secondary Schools”

13 Moats, “Teaching Reading Is Rocket Science”

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