Marshall Street

Literature Review

TURNING THE PAGE TO SECONDARY LITERACY

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

Literature Review

ABSTRACT

Proficient reading is a critical contributor to positive postsecondary outcomes, yet US schools fail to consistently and equitably equip students with the reading skills necessary to participate meaningfully in college and career opportunities. This literature review provides a synthesis of the existing research base of reading intervention for students in grades 4–12. We define secondary reading intervention, explain why it is important, summarize what is known about reading development generally, and synthesize the literature on evidence-based instructional practices for nonproficient readers. We provide a summary of the limited research findings specific to Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty and highlight relevant findings related to teacher professional development.

Introduction

In addition to the specific college and career-ready standards specified for each grade level, the authors of the **Common Core State Standards** have articulated the characteristics of literate individuals, including that they:

- demonstrate independence,
- build strong content knowledge,
- respond to varying text demands,
- comprehend as well as critique,
- value evidence,
- use technology capably, and
- come to understand other perspectives and cultures (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices 2010).

Achieving these characteristics requires secondary readers to flexibly and strategically employ a range of complex reading behaviors, including reading text fluently, deducing the meaning of unknown words, using strategies to support comprehension actively and flexibly, bringing background knowledge on a wide range of topics to the reading experience, reasoning and making inferences while reading, and maintaining motivation to read and engagement in the reading process (Torgesen et al. 2007). Indeed, the demands on secondary readers are significant, yet current and historical assessments of reading proficiency suggest that many middle and high school students do not demonstrate proficient reading skills (National Assessment of Educational Progress 2022).

This literature review was written for an audience of educators, schools, and districts seeking to change these outcomes for secondary students with a focus on Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty. Our goal is to provide a comprehensive yet concise summary of recent research, literature reviews, and meta-analyses on this topic to aid our audience in understanding (1) which practices are most likely to improve reading proficiency for secondary readers and (2) under what conditions these practices should be applied. We begin with defining and clarifying the importance of secondary reading intervention and proceed to summarize the following subtopics:

- **UNDERSTANDING READING DEVELOPMENT**
- **UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENT READING**
- **INSTRUCTIONAL TARGETS FOR NONPROFICIENT SECONDARY READERS**
- **CROSS-CUTTING FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE SECONDARY READING INTERVENTIONS**
- **READING INTERVENTION FOR BLACK AND LATINX STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES EXPERIENCING POVERTY**
- **BUILDING EDUCATOR CAPACITY**

The review focuses on literature published in the last 20 years and includes older, seminal studies where relevant (e.g., Gough and Tunmer 1986). We focus on summarizing the findings of several comprehensive literature reviews and meta-analyses of reading interventions for older readers and include additional studies published in scholarly journals where applicable. Because the reading profiles and instructional needs of upper elementary students are often more similar to those of middle and high school students than students in the primary elementary grades, students in grades 4–12 are included in the research summarized in the review. While the literature review does include research specific to our target population, this population is also underrepresented in the literature, and thus we also summarize the research related to nonproficient secondary readers more broadly.

This literature review is part of a larger collection of improvement tools for districts. The Networked Improvement Community for Students with Disabilities (NIC), a group of 10 public charter school networks serving more than 75,000 students nationwide, launched in 2019 to make dramatic gains in the learning experiences, environments, and outcomes for Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty. Led by Marshall Street at Summit Public Schools in partnership with technical assistance providers NIRN, RTI International, SRI International, and SWIFT Education Center, NIC participants used continuous improvement methods, supported by this literature review of leading research and a corresponding toolkit of best practices, to improve implementation in these areas with the potential to increase academic outcomes for students with disabilities: Collaboration, Literacy, Multi-tiered Systems of Support, Transitions, and Emotional and Behavioral Supports.

What is secondary reading intervention?

Secondary reading intervention refers most simply to interventions implemented by educators and school systems to improve reading outcomes for nonproficient secondary readers.

Lupo et al. (2024) offer a conceptual framework for literacy intervention at the secondary level which defines literacy intervention as "any instructional effort to support adolescents' reading, including foundational skills, cognitive processes, meaning-making, agency, and identity." The framework further differentiates within-classroom from supplemental supports and emphasizes the importance of professional learning that addresses critical content, supports a collaborative approach, and is aligned with broader school and district structures, vision, and goals.

Why is secondary reading intervention important?

Reading intervention in the secondary setting is important because reading proficiency is associated with myriad school-based factors, including achievement in content area classes and graduation rates (Kamil et al. 2008; Snow and Biancarosa 2003), as well as overall life outcomes such as employment, earnings, and physical and psychological well-being (Mulcahy et al. 2016). For students with disabilities, especially students with multiple disabilities, the ability to read and learn contributes to increased levels of independence in life skills (Kauffman 1996 in Almalki 2016). Additionally, reading is the primary vehicle for learning in the secondary grades (Vaughn and Fletcher 2012). However, based on the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress assessment, just 29% of 8th grade students attending public schools in the US are reading proficiently. When the results are disaggregated by the subgroups that represent the Networked Improvement Community's target population, the numbers are even more concerning; just 16% of Black 8th grade students and 21% of Hispanic 8th grade students are reading proficiently, compared to 38% of white students. Nine percent of 8th grade students with disabilities are reading proficiently compared with 34% of students without disabilities.

While preventing reading difficulties in the primary grades has historically received more attention than secondary reading intervention, this population has been increasingly studied in recent years. 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 to address these needs—in order to act immediately on a broad scale" (Biancarosa and Snow 2006, 10). The focus of reading instruction at the

secondary level is unique from that focus on early prevention in the primary grades. Middle and high school students must be able to learn and make meaning from a diverse range of texts across content areas (Biancarosa and Snow 2006). Secondary educators, then, are tasked with ensuring that students move beyond basic word reading toward the more complex and challenging reading requirements of secondary texts. This is particularly challenging given that secondary nonproficient readers tend to demonstrate a broad and complex range of difficulties ranging from deficits in word reading to underdeveloped vocabulary and background knowledge.

Encouragingly, research indicates that adolescence is not too late to intervene and that nonproficient secondary readers can benefit from reading intervention when it is planned carefully, implemented consistently, and based on evidence-based instructional practices. The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize the current research on secondary reading interventions with a particular focus on the NIC's target population in the interest of providing schools and educators with a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape and thereby informing the implementation of evidence-based practices.



Collegiate Academies

Understanding Reading Development

To effectively design and implement interventions for nonproficient secondary readers, it is important to first understand how reading develops. The phrase “Science of Reading ‘’ has become common vernacular for educators interested in improving student reading outcomes. The Reading League, a national nonprofit organization with a mission to advance the awareness, understanding, and use of evidence-aligned reading instruction, defines the science of reading as follows:

> **“The science of reading is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing.**
>
> **This research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages. The science of reading has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some have difficulty; and how we can most effectively assess and teach and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties.”**
>
> THE READING LEAGUE, N.D., 6

For this literature review, three key frameworks proposed within the science of reading will lay the foundation for understanding how reading develops: the **Simple View of Reading**, **Scarborough’s Reading Rope**, and the **National Reading Panel Report**.

First, the Simple View of Reading (Gough and Tunmer 1986) offers a straightforward way of conceptualizing the factors that contribute to a process that is anything but simple. The Simple View of Reading emphasizes that reading comprehension, which is the ultimate goal of reading, is the product of two factors: word recognition and language comprehension. *Word recognition* refers to the understanding that graphemes (or letters and letter combinations) represent sounds (or phonemes), learning the relationship between phonemes and graphemes, and using this knowledge to read unknown words, while *language comprehension* refers to understanding the meaning of words, phrases, sentences, and passages. The Simple View of Reading illustrates the importance of these two factors as individual but equally influential elements of proficient reading.

The Simple View of Reading

Word Recognition
The ability to transform print into spoken language

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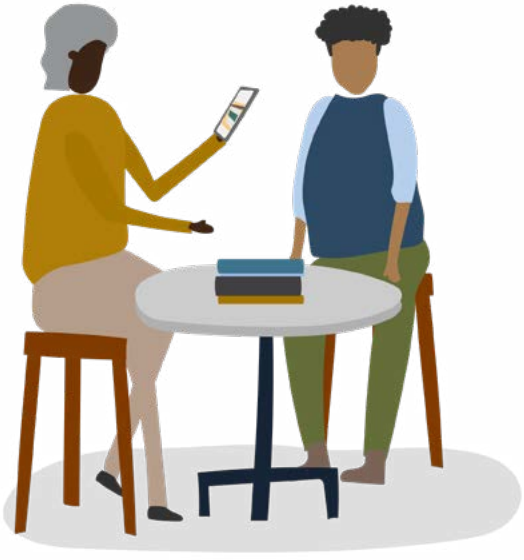
Language Comprehension
The ability to understand spoken language

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Reading Comprehension

Scarborough's Reading Rope (Scarborough 2001) expands upon the Simple View of Reading in several important ways. First, the Reading Rope illustrates word recognition and language comprehension as two individual yet intertwined strands of a rope. Second, it identifies the specific subcomponents that comprise each strand, including:

- Word Recognition:
  - Phonological awareness (awareness of the sound structure of language)
  - Decoding (alphabetic principle, phoneme-grapheme knowledge, and phonic decoding)
  - Sight word recognition (ability to recognize words automatically)
- Language Comprehension:
  - Background knowledge (facts, concepts, etc.)
  - Vocabulary (breadth and depth of word knowledge, word learning strategies)
  - Language structures (syntax, semantics)
  - Verbal reasoning (inferences, metaphor, etc.)
  - Literacy knowledge (print concepts, genres, text features)



The Reading Rope illustrates the synergy between the two strands; as word recognition skills become increasingly automatic for developing readers, language comprehension skills become increasingly strategic, ultimately leading to skilled and proficient reading.

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was commissioned by Congress in the late 1990s to review the existing literature on different approaches to teaching reading and to produce a report summarizing the panel's conclusions. Based on their comprehensive review, the panel identified five essential components of reading to be addressed in reading instruction (National Reading Panel 2000):

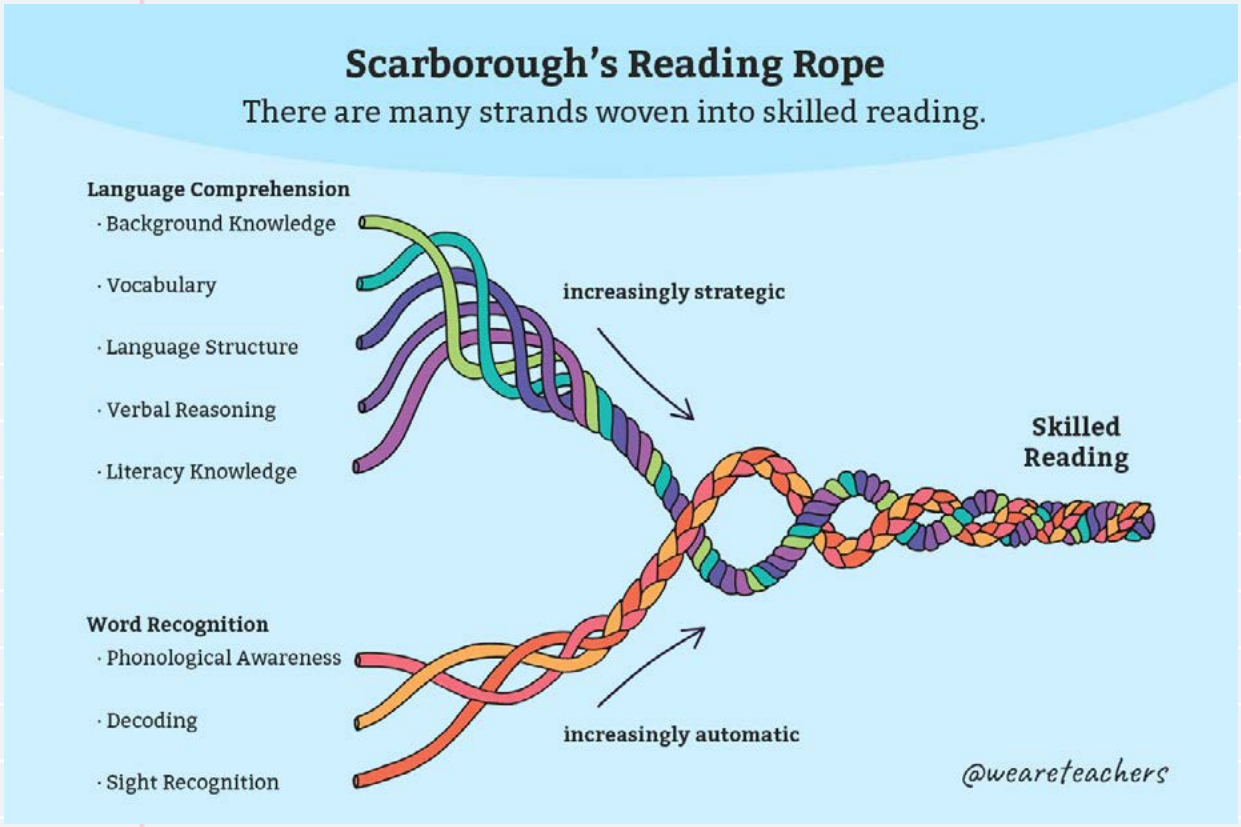


Image source: We Are Teachers, https://www.weareteachers.com/scarboroughs-rope/

Phonemic awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension
The ability to recognize and manipulate the individual phonemes, or sounds, within words	Knowledge of the relationship between graphemes (or letters) and phonemes and the application of these relationships to decoding words	Reading text with speed, accuracy, and prosody	Word knowledge and word learning strategies	Comprehension strategies, such as summarization, asking and answering questions, and monitoring comprehension while reading

The NRP report also provided recommendations for targeted and intensive interventions for at-risk readers and comprehensive professional development for teachers.

Understanding Adolescent Reading

While these three frameworks are helpful for understanding the components of proficient reading, much of the science of reading has focused on emerging and developing readers in the primary grades. For example, while the NRP report highlighted important findings from the field and is still frequently referenced today, it focused primarily on instruction and outcomes in the early elementary grades. Since that time, researchers have endeavored to better understand and communicate the science of teaching adolescent readers and, more specifically, adolescent readers who have not yet developed reading proficiency.

In a review of the impact of reading interventions on adolescent readers, Edmonds and colleagues (2009) note that proficient readers engage the following skills while reading: efficient decoding of unknown words, fluent and accurate reading of text, knowledge of word meanings, connecting new content to prior schema and knowledge, applying strategic reading comprehension strategies, and monitoring their understanding while they read. These skills represent the myriad ways in which the reading process can break down for nonproficient adolescent readers. In fact, the majority of nonproficient secondary readers will have deficits in more than one subcomponent of reading (Roberts et al. 2008; Clemens et al. 2017; Biancarosa and Snow 2006).

While research consistently suggests that early intervention is both more efficient and more effective than intervening in the later grades, there is also evidence that targeted interventions can benefit older nonproficient readers (Scammacca et al. 2007). The instructional targets for nonproficient secondary readers, however, will differ slightly from the focus on preventing reading failure in the primary grades.

Instructional Targets for Nonproficient Secondary Readers

Research on reading interventions for nonproficient secondary readers highlights instructional foci that differ only slightly from the recommendations of the National Reading Panel. The recommended instructional targets include multisyllabic word reading, reading fluency, reading comprehension strategies, vocabulary, and motivation and engagement (Boardman et al. 2008; Roberts et al. 2008; Vaughn et al. 2022). .

Multisyllabic Word Reading

Often, older students who are not yet reading grade-level text fluently and accurately can decode single-syllable words but have difficulty decoding multisyllabic words, or words comprised of more than one syllable (Archer et al. 2003; Vaughn et al. 2022). The majority of words that students will encounter in the middle and high school classroom are words of two or more syllables (Nagy and Anderson 1984), and the slow, effortful reading of these words represents a serious impediment to overall text comprehension.

Word study instruction, which focuses on teaching word analysis skills and building morphological awareness, has been shown to benefit older nonproficient readers (Boardman et al 2008; Scammaca et al. 2007). Fluency with multisyllabic word reading can improve overall reading fluency and comprehension, build students' confidence in reading grade-level texts, and improve motivation and engagement in reading (Vaughn et al. 2022).

Word analysis instruction typically consists of teaching students syllabication strategies, or strategies for breaking words into syllables (Honig et al. 2018; Vaughn et al. 2022), then reading the word by syllables and blending the segments to form a word that is in the student's oral working vocabulary (Bhattacharya and Ehri 2004). It is important to ensure that students have adequate monosyllabic word reading skills, such as mastery of phoneme-grapheme relationships and phonic decoding skills, before focusing on multisyllabic word reading instruction (Vaughn et al. 2022).

Instruction designed to build students' morphological awareness focuses on teaching the pronunciation, orthography, and meaning of morphemes, or the smallest unit of words that hold meanings, including prefixes, suffixes, and roots (Honig et al. 2018). Explicit instruction designed to build morphological awareness has been shown to be especially helpful for multilingual learners (Haager and Osipova 2017; Cárdenas-Hagan 2020) and secondary students with disabilities (Harris et al. 2011; Roberts et al. 2008).

Word study instruction should teach students to be flexible decoders who are able to apply word analysis and morphological awareness skills to reading of unknown words and who are also able to recognize irregular words that do not follow predictable phonological and/or orthographic patterns (Boardman et al. 2008). Embedding spelling instruction within word study and providing students with many opportunities to practice word analysis skills during independent reading can increase the impact of word study instruction (Vaughn et al. 2022).

Fluency

Reading fluency is defined as accurate reading of connected text, at a conversational rate and with adequate prosody (Hudson et al. 2008) and fluent older readers typically read texts at rates ranging from 120 to 170 correct words per minute (Hasbrouck and Tindal 2005). Fluent text reading is strongly correlated with reading comprehension (Torgesen and Hudson 2006). This is in part because fluent and automatic reading frees up cognitive resources, allowing the reader to devote attention to meaning-making rather than word reading (Honig et al. 2018). This is especially important for adolescent readers who are tasked with acquiring a significant amount of content area knowledge through reading (Boardman et al. 2008).

Nonproficient adolescent readers, including students with reading disabilities, often struggle to read grade-level text fluently and automatically (Boardman et al. 2008; Meyer and Felton 1999) and when reading is slow and effortful, working memory is taxed and reading comprehension is compromised (Perfetti and Lesgold 1977). There is some evidence that instruction targeting reading fluency can increase oral reading fluency rates, but the degree to which these increases generalize to non-practiced passages and overall comprehension for older nonproficient readers is mixed. Some researchers suggest that reading fluency instruction is more effective when it is paired with targeted word-learning instruction, such as the word study strategies described above (Roberts et al. 2008).

Instructional practices for building reading fluency that are supported by research included repeated reading (Honig et al. 2018; Therrien 2004; Stevens et al. 2017), partner reading (Honig et al. 2018), and goal-setting and progress-monitoring procedures that actively involve students (Boardman et al. 2008), with repeated reading cited as the most promising practice for building fluency. Repeated reading has been shown to increase both reading rate and reading accuracy for Black middle school students with disabilities (Paige 2006). Strategies to increase the effectiveness of repeated reading include establishing a clear purpose for the activity with the student, pre-teaching difficult words, explicitly teaching students to read with prosody, and checking for understanding after reading (Vaughn et al. 2022).

Comprehension Strategies

Reading comprehension is a complex, multidimensional endeavor, and proficient adolescent readers strategically link new learning to existing knowledge, monitor their understanding as they read, and deploy "fix-up" strategies when reading breaks down. Nonproficient readers, even those with adequate word reading and fluency skills, often fail to use these strategies (Roberts et al. 2008). Explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies can improve students' strategy use and overall reading comprehension (Scammacca et al. 2007; Edmonds et al. 2009; Swanson et al. 2017; Sohn et al. 2023). The following reading comprehension strategies are recommended for explicit instruction (Roberts et al. 2008; Kamil et al. 2008; Vaughn et al. 2022):

- **Activating prior knowledge:** As described previously, nonproficient secondary readers develop less background knowledge than their proficient peers and often fail to access the knowledge they have while reading. Explicitly teaching students to activate prior knowledge supports meaning-making by building connections between the known and the new. Educators can build and activate prior knowledge by providing brief introductions to the topic(s) prior to reading, sharing multimedia and asking students to notice specific elements of the information presented, and asking targeted questions.
- **Use of graphic organizers to categorize information:** Nonproficient secondary readers often fail to apply strategies to organize new information as they read. The use of graphic organizers can support students in activating prior knowledge, making connections between key ideas, and recording important information to support summarizing.
- **Comprehension monitoring:** Nonproficient secondary readers often fail to notice when comprehension breaks down while reading, so they are unable to apply "fix-up" strategies. Teaching students explicit techniques for monitoring comprehension, such as visualizing, asking questions while reading, pausing periodically to summarize, and re-reading can support overall comprehension.
- **Summarizing:** Nonproficient secondary readers often have difficulty synthesizing large amounts of information into main ideas. Modeling the steps to organizing a summary, teaching students to use text structures to support summarizing, using metacognitive "think alouds," and analyzing examples and non-examples of accurate summaries can support students in developing independence with summarization.

Research has suggested that, while comprehension strategy instruction must be explicit, direct instruction can be brief, and instructional routines can quickly shift to focus on both collaborative and independent application (Vaughn et al. 2022). In fact, some researchers argue that the specific strategies that are taught are less important than the active engagement of comprehension strategies generally (Kamil et al. 2008). Further recommendations include embedding comprehension strategy instruction within multiple content areas, direct and explicit teaching of strategies using a metacognitive approach, and modeling of strategies accompanied by guided practice opportunities (Swanson et al. 2017; Boardman 2008; Scammacca et al. 2007).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is strongly correlated with reading comprehension across grade levels and reading abilities (Beck et al. 2013). This is particularly true for secondary readers who are tasked with learning through content-area texts in which specialized vocabulary represents much of the text's meaning (Kamil et al. 2008). While students do learn word meanings through direct instruction, the majority of new word learning in the middle and high school grades occurs through extensive reading practice across a range of genres (Roberts et al. 2008). Nonproficient adolescent readers tend to avoid reading and often lack the reading skills necessary for independent engagement with grade-level texts. This results in fewer opportunities to develop the depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge necessary for reading comprehension (Hirsch 2003).

Recommended instructional practices for developing vocabulary included strategic selection of words for direct instruction, providing student-friendly definitions of target words, multiple exposures to words over time, providing opportunities for students to actively engage with word meanings, and explicitly teaching word learning strategies (Boardman et al. 2008; Kamil et al. 2008; Swanson and Wexler 2017).

Beck and colleagues (2013) suggest that educators focus explicit word instruction on "Tier 2 words," or those words that students are likely to encounter frequently in text but are unlikely to implicitly learn via conversation. These words are typically drawn from content-area texts and represent those that students will encounter frequently in grade-level reading.

Researchers suggest that it can take up to 17 exposures for a student to learn a new word, and educators should plan for multiple exposures to target words both within a single lesson and over time (Kamil et al. 2008). Activities to encourage students to actively engage with word meanings include asking students to distinguish between and identify examples and non-examples of words, to describe how a target word is related to another known word, and to include target vocabulary words in their writing (Beck et al. 2013).

Word learning strategies include using context clues, leveraging morphological awareness, and accessing resources such as online dictionaries (Beck et al. 2013; Vaughn et al. 2013).

Similar to the findings related to fluency instruction, vocabulary instruction has mixed results in improving overall reading comprehension for nonproficient secondary readers (Scammacca et al. 2007). The most promising avenue to improved vocabulary instruction for older readers is likely to be "reading a lot, reading well, and reading widely" (Cunningham and Stanovich 1998 as cited in Roberts et al. 2008).

Motivation and Engagement

Making meaning from complex texts is an active, effortful process that requires the conscious application of strategies on the part of the reader. Motivated students "usually want to understand text content fully and therefore, process information deeply. As they read frequently with these cognitive purposes, motivated students gain in reading comprehension proficiency" (Guthrie et al. as cited in Roberts 2008, 67). Nonproficient adolescent readers often lack motivation to read (Boardman et al. 2008; Roberts et al. 2008), resulting in a lower volume of reading and fewer opportunities to practice strategy use and develop the vocabulary and background knowledge necessary to comprehend grade-level texts.

Evidence-based practices for fostering reading motivation and engagement among nonproficient adolescent readers include (Kamil et al. 2008; Boardman et al. 2008, Roberts et al. 2008; Biancarosa and Snow 2006):

- **Establishing concrete goals for reading and engaging students in monitoring progress toward those goals:** Studies show that, when educators establish performance goals, emphasize the learning process, and provide verbal praise based on effort, students are more likely to develop personal learning goals and are more likely to be motivated and engaged in reading.
- **Supporting student autonomy through choice:** Offering students choice in both reading materials and reading activities is associated with greater ownership of learning and overall engagement.
- **Leveraging texts that are aligned with student interests:** Students are more likely to persist in reading texts about topics they are interested in, and they are also more likely to remember information from these materials. In designing libraries of texts for independent reading, secondary educators should consider cultivating texts on topics about which students have background knowledge, texts that students perceive they will be successful at reading, and texts that are relevant to students' lived experiences.
- **Increasing social interactions related to reading:** Secondary students are motivated by opportunities to learn collaboratively, and social interaction during reading activities can increase both motivation and comprehension. Collaborative reading activities can be fostered by explicitly teaching and reinforcing collaboration and communication skills, strategically partnering students based on reading proficiency, and allowing students to read together and present their learning to peers.



Cross-Cutting Features of Effective Secondary Reading Interventions

In addition to a general consensus on the instructional priorities for secondary reading intervention, research has identified several cross-cutting features of effective approaches to improving reading outcomes for nonproficient secondary readers.

FIRST, NONPROFICIENT SECONDARY READERS OFTEN NEED SUPPORT IN DEVELOPING MORE THAN ONE OF THE SUBCOMPONENT SKILLS RELATED TO PROFICIENT READING.

It is not surprising, then, that interventions that target multiple components tend to be more effective than those that target a single component of reading (Edmonds et al. 2009). It is particularly important that educators focus secondary reading interventions on the ultimate goal of reading comprehension, and word-level or fluency interventions should also integrate reading comprehension instruction (Edmonds et al. 2009; Sohn et al. 2023).

SECOND, READING INTERVENTION AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL SHOULD BE CONTENT-EMBEDDED.

This involves both direct teachers of reading (e.g., English Language Arts (ELA) teachers, reading intervention teachers) providing content-area texts for instruction and independent practice and content-area teachers reinforcing those reading skills that are most applicable to their subject areas during instruction (Biancarosa and Snow 2006). Embedding reading instruction within content-area texts supports generalization, increases student access to reading instruction across the day, and provides students with more opportunities to practice applying reading skills in a variety of texts.

THIRD, SECONDARY READING INTERVENTIONS ARE MOST EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTED WITH A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT (MTSS) (VAUGHN AND FLETCHER 2012).

Because secondary nonproficient readers have diverse and complex needs, it is important that interventions are aligned with students' identified areas of need (Scammacca et al. 2007; Kamil et al. 2008; Boardman et al. 2008). Categorizing students into subgroups by priority skills for development is a process that can be achieved via universal screening and follow-up diagnostic assessment for students identified as nonproficient readers. See the **Multi-tiered Systems of Support Literature Review** for a comprehensive review of the literature on MTSS.

FINALLY, ONE CONTRIBUTOR TO POOR READING SKILLS FOR SECONDARY READERS IS A LACK OF EXPOSURE.

Nonproficient readers tend to engage in a lower volume of reading than proficient readers, meaning they have fewer opportunities to practice strategies and build important vocabulary and background knowledge. Therefore, successful secondary reading interventions will include extended opportunities for readers to practice applying skills independently while reading connected text. Educators seeking to build libraries to support independent text reading should consider the following:

- Including “stretch texts,” or those texts that are at the higher end of students’ instructional levels and will expose students to rich vocabulary and complex syntax (Vaughn et al. 2022)
- Texts that are aligned with students’ interests and world experiences and texts in which students see themselves represented (Roberts et al. 2008; Biancarosa and Snow 2006)
- Texts that are high interest but at an a range of readability levels (Biancarosa and Snow 2006)

Reading Intervention for Black and Latinx Students with Disabilities Experiencing Poverty

Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty have significantly lower reading proficiency rates than white students, students without disabilities, and students who are ineligible for federal free and reduced lunch (Snow and Biancarosa 2003). Factors that explain the link between socioeconomic status (SES) and reading achievement include both home environmental factors, such as the home literacy environment, parental stress, and oral language exposure, and school-based factors, such as the percentage of students reading below grade level, the concentration of students from low SES backgrounds, and teacher perception, expectations, and knowledge of the language and literacy skills that contribute to reading development (Aikens and Barbarin 2008; Romeo et al. 2022).

While SES is a strong predictor of reading achievement, it is not predictive of responsiveness to evidence-based reading interventions, and studies have shown that students from low SES backgrounds respond at least as favorably to these interventions as students from average to high SES backgrounds (Morris et al. 2012).

> **“This we know: reading failure can be prevented in all but a small percentage of children with serious learning disorders. It is possible to teach most students how to read if we start early and follow the significant body of research showing which practices are most effective. Students living in poverty, students of color, and students who are eligible for remedial services can become competent readers — at any age. Persistent “gaps” between more advantaged and less advantaged students can be narrowed and even closed. Fundamentally, these gaps are the result of differences in students’ opportunities to learn — not their learning abilities”**
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> **MOATS 2020, 4**

There has been long-standing concern in the field of special education that particular subgroups of students, including Black students, students who are multilingual learners, and students from households with a low socioeconomic status are disproportionately represented within special education (Morgan 2020) and that they experience poorer outcomes as a result (Bal and Trainor 2016). However, more recent analyses have found that Black and Hispanic children are significantly less likely than otherwise similar white children to receive special education services. Farkas and Morgan (2018) found that 74% of 4th grade white students with reading difficulties were receiving specialized reading services through special education, whereas only 44% of Black and 43% of Hispanic students with reading difficulties received such specialized services. Schools with majority white student populations have, on average, 3.5 specialists who have been trained in specialized instruction for students with reading disabilities, compared to schools with student populations that are less than 15% white who employ just one such specialist on average (Carr 2022). White students are also more likely than Black students to be diagnosed with dyslexia, resulting in Black students having less access to programs designed to support their academic success (Farkas and Morgan 2018). Even when students who are experiencing poverty and students living in households speaking languages other than English do receive specialized reading services in schools, this instruction tends to rely on the availability of commercial programs that focus on the procedural subskills that contribute to reading, such as word reading and reading fluency, at the exclusion of conceptual and knowledge-based skills, such as vocabulary knowledge and verbal reasoning skills (Lesaux 2012).

This literature review suggests that Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty are likely to experience reading difficulty due to myriad factors and that they are less likely than their white and higher-income peers to receive quality reading intervention in school. **Research suggests that this population of students does respond favorably when provided with evidence-based reading interventions and that it is not that the approach must be significantly different, but rather that the practices that have been shown to be effective for nonproficient secondary readers must be more consistently available to all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, racial background, or disability status.**



Summit Public Schools

Building Educator Capacity

These recommendations require specialized knowledge and expertise on the part of secondary educators. In a survey of professional development practices within US schools, Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2009) found that while most teachers participate in multiple professional development opportunities each year, nearly half are dissatisfied with these activities. It is not surprising, then, that secondary educators report feeling underprepared to meet the needs of nonproficient readers (Kamil et al. 2008; Boardman et al. 2008). Still, other secondary content-area teachers do not feel that teaching reading is their responsibility (Kamil et al. 2008). Even when educators do receive training in strategies to support nonproficient readers, they rarely receive ongoing support, resulting in low fidelity of implementation (James-Burdumy et al. 2009).

Because professional development delivered in a conducive environment has been associated with improved student outcomes (Wayne et al. 2008; Basma and Savage 2018), schools need to consider the features of effective professional development. Structurally, professional development activities should be:

- "intensive, connected to practice, and ongoing,
- directly connected to student learning goals and address the teaching of specific curriculum content,
- aligned with school improvement goals,
- designed to build strong, professional relationships among teachers, and
- designed to include active learning for teachers" (Kosanovich et al. 2010, 86).

At the secondary level, professional development should focus on building teacher understanding of the process of reading comprehension, instructional routines and approaches that support reading development, and how students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds impact their interactions with texts (Lupo et al. 2024). When applicable, professional development should also center the curricular resources teachers are using in their classrooms (Hayes-Jacobs and Johnson 2009). Finally, professional development that occurs through varied avenues, including coaching, analysis of student data to inform instruction, and communities of practice contributes to increased knowledge and implementation of evidence-based reading instruction (Connor et al. 2014).

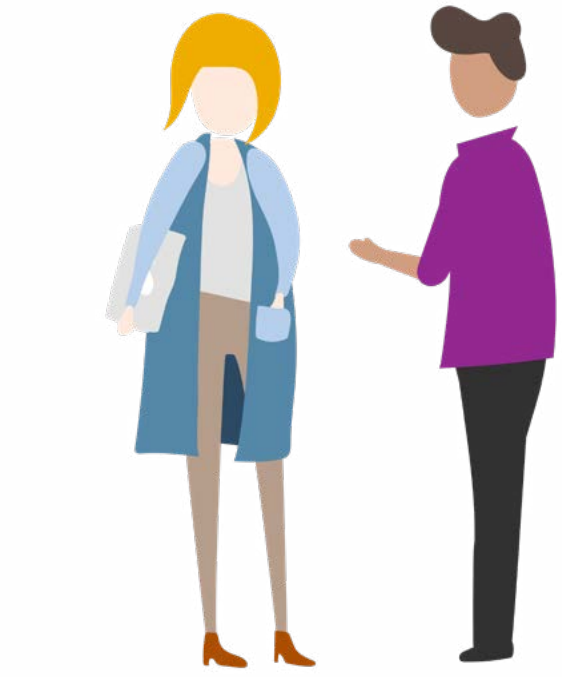


Conclusion

In conclusion, reading proficiency is an essential component of college and career readiness, and learning demands in the secondary setting require a wide set of complex reading skills. While reading proficiency rates for secondary students, and in particular Black and Latinx students with disabilities experiencing poverty, are disappointing, educators and schools interested in improving these outcomes can be encouraged by the finding that secondary students can benefit from appropriately designed and implemented reading interventions.

As district officials make program decisions on their approaches to reading intervention, the following key points from the research can serve as a north star:

- **The Simple View of Reading** and **Scarborough's Reading Rope** provide useful models for understanding how individuals learn to read. These models can be used to think strategically and tactically about the literacy programs and interventions needed to support students in becoming skilled readers.
- Recommended instructional targets for nonproficient secondary readers include multisyllabic word reading, reading fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension strategy use, and motivation and engagement.
- Nonproficient secondary readers tend to have deficits in more than one subcomponent of reading, and intervention for these students should target multiple components.
- Secondary reading intervention is most effective when implemented in the context of a multi-tiered system of support and, more specifically, when diagnostic assessment is used to identify students' specific areas of need and interventions are aligned accordingly.
- Secondary reading intervention is most impactful when it is embedded in content-area instruction and texts.
- Students need extensive opportunities to practice reading skills while independently reading connected texts, and educators should be mindful of providing both the time and the materials to support independent reading across the day.
- Secondary teachers feel unprepared to teach nonproficient secondary readers. Professional development should serve to build an understanding of the reading process, increase capacity to design and deliver evidence-based reading instruction, and develop an awareness of the ways in which students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds impact their interactions with text.



Appendix

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