NETWORKED IMPROVEMENT COMMUNITY

Reading Across the Curriculum: How One High School is Building Literacy into Every Classroom

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At Collegiate Baton Rouge (CBR), as at high schools everywhere, a scholar's reading ability can have life-changing effects, providing—or preventing—access to academic achievement and post-secondary opportunity. For educators at CBR, this reality gives rise to a sense of urgency that has led to a campus-wide reading strategy that's already showing promising results. After just half a year of a new fluency practice, 34 percent of CBR students had achieved more than two years of reading growth, with the students furthest below grade-level showing the most improvement.

How did CBR make this progress possible? By making every teacher a reading teacher.

The endeavor, led by CBR Director of Literacy Kim Richardson, builds upon a multi-year effort to transform school culture and add more than 28 hours of reading fluency instruction for every student. The site has been deeply focused on ensuring that non-proficient readers build momentum to make dramatic growth in literacy to prepare them for rich opportunities beyond high school. "The whole experience around reading now has completely shifted," says Richardson. "There is an excitement and joy and love of reading for some kids that they just didn't have before."



CBR Fluency leads, Kim Richardson and Coral Peters

Fluency in Every Class

On a typical morning in Christian Cantrelle's Algebra I class, 30 teens stream into the classroom, one of four classes they attend each day. As the bell rings, they each retrieve the packet of materials that Cantrelle has prepared for the day. On most days, the packet includes a fluency sheet, which serves as a signal to the students that they are about to practice reading. Students turn or move to connect with the reading partners Cantrelle assigned to them early in the term. She starts the one-minute timer, and across the classroom, one student in each pair begins reading aloud about a topic connected to the day's algebra lesson. Each partner follows along, recording mistakes: "any kind of stumble, an added word that isn't there, a pause, a skipped word," says Cantrelle. After one minute, partners take an additional minute to debrief, then they switch roles and repeat the process. Finally, they complete a comprehension exercise curated for the reading. The entire exercise takes about five minutes.

Across the school, the process is repeated in every classroom, where teachers have selected reading passages to support their curriculum. In Jazmine Milburn's photography class, for example, students might read a passage on photography's "rule of thirds." In Shawandalet Parker's science classroom, it could be on how to engage in scientific discussion. In Yolanda Champion's financial literacy, it may be on budgeting.

Over and over, students encounter academic vocabulary, practice fluent reading, and complete at least one or two depth-of-knowledge comprehension questions. The repeated reading practice improves fluency—measured by accuracy (reading the words correctly), rate (reading the words at a conversational rate), and prosody (reading the words with expression)—and builds background knowledge for scholars whose access to broad and deep learning is limited. Consequently, while building transferable reading skills, the practice also helps students gain a deeper understanding of the grade-level content in each course.

To encourage the adoption of the practice, Richardson took a flexible approach to implementing the fluency protocol. In every classroom, reading practice is expected to occur at least three days per week. How it occurs is teacher-driven; each teacher integrates it in a way that works best in their classroom. For some, it's at the beginning of the class, for others, the end. Teachers have autonomy to choose when and how to do vocabulary and comprehension activities. For example:

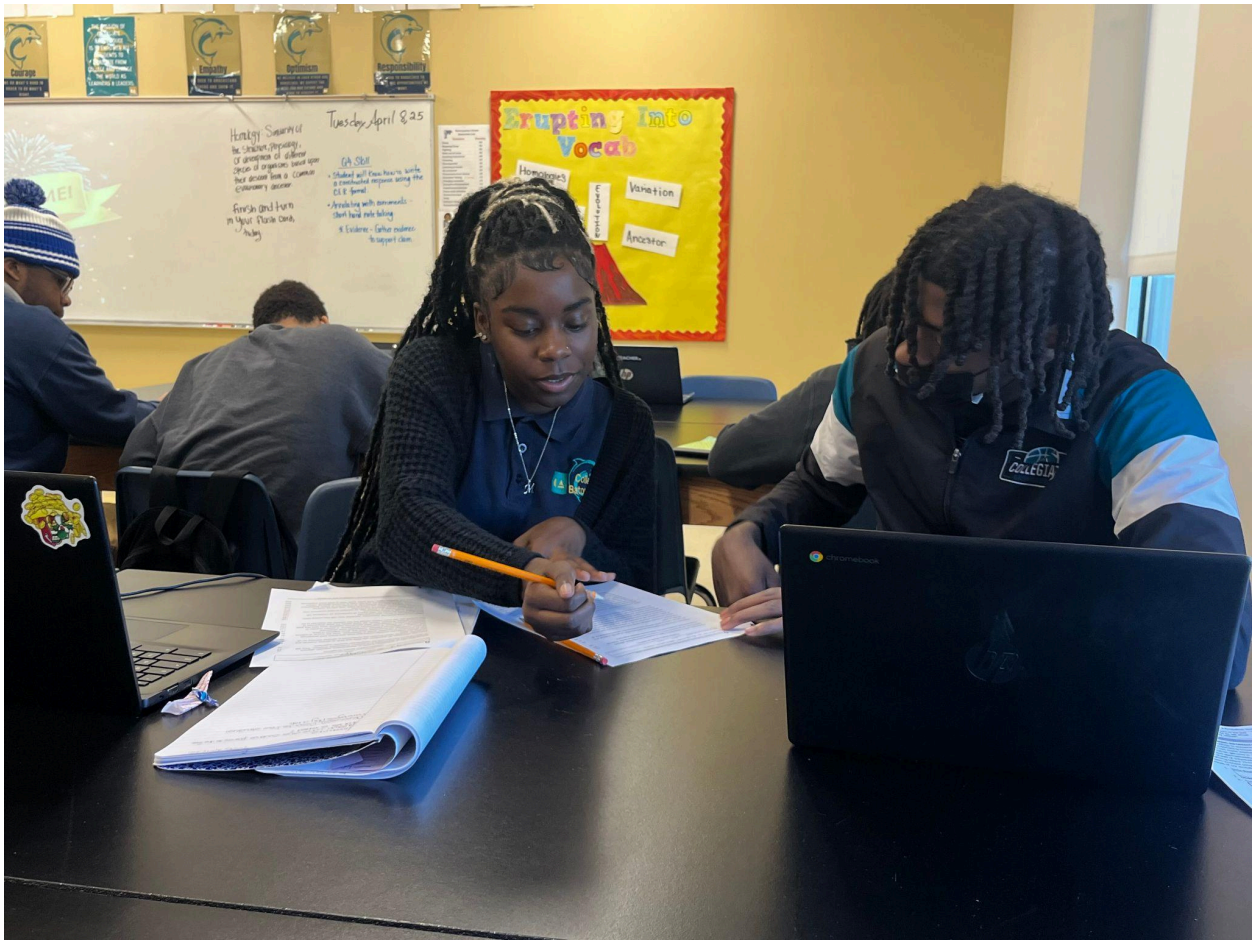
- Some choose to make a week-long "science of reading" packet containing exercises for each day, including a fluency passage, a place to record their words per minute, a vocabulary interaction, and comprehension questions.

- Others, like Cantrelle, add fluency activities into instructional materials at least three days per week, using each day's instruction to guide the reading topic, activity, and level of engagement.

- Some teachers do comprehension activities that progressively go deeper into the learning, so that by Friday, students have moved from multiple choice to constructive response questions for deeper engagement.

The team has also adopted tools and techniques to lighten the load for teachers. For example, after implementation data collected by CBR and their partners at Marshall CoLab identified material preparation as a core barrier, CBR Director of Academics Coral Peters turned to free AI tools to help generate passages. After some trial and error, she developed a resource that teachers can use when prep time becomes a barrier to fluency implementation.

Support for teachers extends to coaching in the fluency practice, and every other week's school-wide professional development priorities are tied to the culture of literacy. Peters and Richardson regularly gather staff to reflect on data and progress. They look at benchmark data to observe growth, elevate particular students and trends, and discuss opportunities to continue improving. Celebration is a regular feature of the support they provide—sharing pictures, videos, and shout-outs to acknowledge the importance of their literacy efforts and build momentum for future progress. Peters describes the shared courage necessary to tackle literacy as a complex area of focus—"We do what's hard in order to do what's right."



Students at CBR engage in the oral reading fluency practice in Ms. Parker's classroom.

A Culture for High-Quality Instruction

Getting to this point has been a multi-year journey, which began by establishing the enabling conditions for the practice. CBR's principal, Devan Richard, described the process, saying, "We've spent a lot of time focusing on strong instructional routines and school culture," ensuring first that teachers had effective instructional practices to apply to designing and delivering lessons.

The fluency protocol is possible at CBR because of these long-term efforts to build a culture around high-quality instruction and a shared mindset that lets every teacher think of themselves as a reading teacher. CBR's rollout of the fluency practice demonstrates how, as Richardson puts it, "this is an 'all of us' goal." Just before launching the protocol, site-wide summer professional development focused on mindsets and a scope and sequence for the practice. The initial plan was to start the year with just English teachers doing reading fluency, and to add history and science by mid-year. Quickly, however, the practice spread further than

anyone had anticipated: By the end of the first quarter, nearly 70% of teachers throughout the school had begun practicing reading fluency with their students, and by mid-year, almost everyone was involved.

The rapid implementation of the protocol is not the only evidence of the larger cultural shift. There are others: Teachers are getting in on the reading action. "I think for me," says Richardson, "one of the biggest joys that I have is people like Coral who brag to the entire staff about how many books she's read, all the time, every day. That's encouraged other staff members to talk about what they're reading and how much they're reading." This mindset for reading is invigorating teachers to provide high-quality, culturally relevant texts to help students find genuine interest and enjoyment. Some teachers are doing novel and book studies in their classrooms and are introducing other discussion structures—such as Discussion Blitz, where students do 10 minutes of independent reading, then engage in discussion about what they've just read—to get students excited about reading.

Excitement for reading is, indeed, growing. According to Richardson, "There have been classes where teachers have 'flipped' some [students] who like reading least, and she's having to tell them 'It's time to move on. Put the book away.'" In fact, the school community is so excited about reading that they have established an extracurricular book club for students and one for teachers as well.

It's no wonder that CBR is seeing encouraging early data:

- At the mid-year point, 47% of students had already met their individual growth targets for the year, including 34% who had achieved two or more years of growth.
- Reading proficiency also increased, with a 4.1% rise in students reading at a high school level.
- While subgroups were initially underperforming relative to the overall average, performance gaps have begun to narrow.

CBR's sense of urgency regarding their students' reading ability is well justified. These improvements can have a profound impact on the lives of students positioned furthest from opportunity. Ample research shows the connection between illiteracy, crime, incarceration, and the need for public assistance, and the U.S. Department of Justice has linked low literacy rates to academic failure and delinquency. Furthermore, recent national data shows falling reading scores, particularly among students with the lowest academic outcomes nationwide.

A Worthy Journey

The CBR educators consider the journey to this current moment to be a worthy undertaking. "Bringing oral reading fluency into band class has helped me take a new step in my teaching

and connect more with what's happening in general education," says band teacher Karron Brown. "Now, adding things like ELA questions feels natural—it's part of the routine and supports literacy in every space."

They all agree, too, that the journey begins with establishing a shared mindset. "[The protocol] is happening for us this year, but building the reading culture has really been the last three years of professional development," says Richardson.

"Everyone has to be on board and be on the same page," says Cantrelle, so that even when teachers are hesitant to add something extra to their lessons, they can "find a way to center literacy around some piece of the lesson. Like in math, a word problem. Make it literacy. Make it fun. Make it so students are taking a second to recognize that it's literacy." The right mindset lets teachers be receptive to finding those moments to push the literacy culture.

With mindsets in place, adopting new literacy routines, like repeated reading, becomes possible. Cantrelle, an early adopter of the reading fluency practice, described how at first, the additional workload was a challenge. "But once I became consistent, I got my routine down," and she cut the prep time by two-thirds. Now, "I've been doing it so long, it's easy for me to just pull a resource from my binder and attach it to the lesson for the day." Her advice? "Don't overthink it. Don't overdo it. Get the fluency passage generator. It really does all the work. Just work smarter, not harder."

Richardson's counsel to educators considering this kind of effort is to keep pushing. "Don't give up. Keep trying different things. Rinse and repeat, and then if that doesn't work, try something else. You'll find something that works."