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## Supporting Adolescent Literacy Achievement

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Without improvements in literacy proficiency among U.S. students, our country will not be poised to compete economically with international peers. Positions that require college and higher level literacy skills will generate about 46 percent of all job growth between 2004 and 2014.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in 2007, only 31 percent of eighth-graders performed at proficiency on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), and score gaps between white and minority students have not budged since 2005.<sup>2</sup> In recognition of the need to boost literacy and academic performance in the next generation of the American workforce, governors and state policymakers are establishing statewide literacy plans. These plans can help states meet critical education goals: achieving adequate yearly progress targets, raising high school graduation rates, increasing the value of the high school diploma, and closing the achievement gap.<sup>3</sup>

This brief enhances recommendations and policy strategies from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) publication *Reading to Achieve: A Governor's Guide to Adolescent Literacy*.<sup>4</sup> It reflects lessons from recent research and best practices from states selected to receive NGA Center support to develop statewide K-12 literacy plans. These plans build upon states' early literacy (kindergarten through third grade) approaches by adding components to support adolescent literacy (fourth grade through twelfth grade). Consistent with the governor's guide developed by the NGA Center Adolescent Literacy Advisory Panel, this brief recommends five policy strategies and provides examples of steps states can take to improve adolescent literacy:

1. Build support for a state focus on adolescent literacy;
2. Raise literacy expectations across the curriculum;
3. Encourage and support school and district literacy plans;
4. Build educators' capacity to provide adolescent literacy instruction; and
5. Measure progress in adolescent literacy at the school, district and state levels.

### INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) issued *Reading to Achieve: A Governor's Guide to Adolescent Literacy*. The guide was developed to alert governors and other key state education policymakers to the many problems, educational and otherwise, resulting from the lack of state policy attention to adolescent literacy, and to provide them guidance and potential solutions to address the issue. Since the release of the guide, the NGA Center has worked with a number of states that have begun to implement the guide's recommendations. With the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the NGA Center in 2006 issued competitive grants and provided technical assistance to **Alabama, Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and North Carolina**. Under the *Reading to Achieve* grant program, these states developed kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-

12) statewide literacy plans, incorporating policy recommendations and responses tailored to their states' adolescent literacy challenges and political contexts. This issue brief draws upon recent research and lessons learned by grant-funded and other states to recommend state strategies for supporting adolescent literacy achievement.

### **What Do We Know about Current U.S. Literacy Performance?**

Too many U.S. students have low levels of literacy performance, and many other countries are outperforming the U.S. Though average reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have risen since 1992, too many students still perform at low literacy levels, and achievement gaps persist. In 2007, only 31 percent of eighth-graders performed at proficient levels, and score gaps between white and minority students have not budged since 2005.<sup>5</sup> Analyses of the 2007 NAEP writing assessment found that only 24 percent of twelfth-grade students score at or above proficiency.<sup>6</sup>

International performance results are another indication that U.S. students are falling behind their peers. Over time, our scores have remained flat while Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) performance in other Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries, including Greece, Korea, Mexico, and Poland, is rising. The U.S. ranks 21st in science literacy among the 30 OECD countries and 25th in mathematics literacy. The nation has also lost ground in science and math performance measured by the Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS).<sup>7</sup> The U.S. high school graduation rate falls below the OECD average, and the relative standing of the U.S. in college-level degree production has fallen from 2nd among OECD countries to 15th over the last decade.<sup>8</sup> The U.S. is also losing ground relative to other countries in percentage of the population earning two-year and four-year college degrees.<sup>9</sup>

Without attention to literacy levels of the current generation of K-12 students, the U.S. may continue to see a decline in the nation's workforce skill levels and thus lose economic ground. About 55 percent of adults at the lowest literacy levels did not graduate from high school and have no high school equivalency diploma.<sup>10</sup> Though past generations were able to find living wage jobs without or with only a high school diploma, such positions will be limited in the near future.

*America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future* notes that the wide disparity in literacy and numeracy skills among school-age and adult populations compounded by the changing economy and demographic trends may augur little economic opportunity for key segments of our society.<sup>11</sup> Technological innovation and globalization contribute to the predicted employment growth in our country, with positions that require college and higher level literacy skills generating about 46 percent of all job growth between 2004 and 2014.<sup>12</sup> Already, a lack of sufficient math and reading instruction costs employers and the nation's colleges \$1.4 billion per year in remediation of high school graduates.<sup>13</sup>

Low literacy levels bode poorly not only for America's economic future but also for the social fabric of the nation. Adults with lower literacy levels are more likely than their more literate peers to be unemployed or out of the labor force and to earn generally lower incomes. These low-literacy adults are also less likely to engage in their communities, vote in elections, or help their children with their homework.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, a survey of adults in prison found that 56 percent of inmates function at the two lowest levels of prose literacy.<sup>15</sup>

### **What Does Research Tell State Policymakers?**

Developing and implementing plans to support K-12 literacy can help governors meet critical

state education goals: achieving adequate yearly progress targets, raising high school graduation rates, increasing the value of the high school diploma, and closing the achievement gap.<sup>16</sup> Leading researchers indicate that although the research base on adolescent literacy could be strengthened, the existing base is sufficient to inform future investment in adolescent literacy.<sup>17</sup> Research published since the release of the NGA Center’s *Reading to Achieve: A Governor’s Guide to Adolescent Literacy* calls for state policymakers to implement strategies advocated in the NGA Center guide.<sup>18</sup> This research indicates that to meet state education goals, state policymakers will need to ensure that a focus on literacy does not end after the early grades, that literacy instruction must prepare students for the literacy demands of postsecondary education and careers, and that educators have the knowledge and skills to prepare students for these demands.

***Attention to literacy must continue beyond grades K-3.*** If states are to meet their education and economic goals, they can no longer end their focus on literacy at the third grade. With the support of policymakers, they must align literacy expectations across the K-12 continuum. To meet federal requirements for Reading First funding, all states developed statewide K-3 literacy plans based upon the National Reading Panel findings.<sup>19</sup> However, reading on grade level by third grade is not sufficient for preparing students for success in high school and beyond. Without attention to continuing literacy instruction and supports beyond third grade, policymakers will squander extensive investments in early literacy acquisition. The focus on early literacy acquisition must be “complemented by ongoing attention to reading instruction in grades four and five, content-area literacy skills in grades six through twelve, and effective, targeted interventions for students falling behind at any point in their literacy development.”<sup>20</sup>

To develop effective K-12 literacy plans, states must add strategic and seamless literacy requirements in the content areas for students in grades four through grade twelve. States must also establish guidelines for identifying and assisting struggling readers who are performing two years or more below grade level. Though some may bristle at more requirements, as a recent adolescent literacy guide for school leaders observes, “. . . literacy support [is] central to, not peripheral to, students’ academic success. Literacy is not something to add to an already overcrowded plate; literacy *is* the plate.”<sup>21</sup> Helping educators as well as the general public understand that students need to be prepared for increasing reading, writing, and thinking demands will require unprecedented state focus on adolescent literacy led by top policymakers.

***College and workforce readiness requires that all students possess strong literacy skills.*** With states raising requirements for high school graduates, content-area literacy becomes increasingly important. As states increase high school graduation requirements to include additional years of laboratory science and mathematics courses, all students will need to become adept at presenting science experiment findings and understanding language unique to the field of mathematics.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, to succeed in the 21st century workplace, young people will need newer skills including media and technology literacy. For example, a high school social studies assignment might ask students to find and analyze demographic data from online local and U.S. Census bureau sources to predict outcomes of an upcoming election.<sup>23</sup> State standards and corresponding curricula must specify and reflect these higher level expectations.<sup>24</sup>

***Educators need knowledge, skills, and support to prepare their students for college and work.*** To help their students develop the literacy expertise required for success, upper-grade elementary and secondary school teachers and administrators need to know how to help students learn the reading, writing, and communication skills of their content areas. They also need training in tailoring instruction to students who are learning English as a second language or enter upper grades with gaps in their reading or writing abilities. Many educators indicate that they did not

receive the literacy training they needed in teacher preparation programs. For example, in response to surveys from Arizona’s 2007 regional adolescent literacy summits, 63 percent of the teachers said that postsecondary institutions did not prepare them to teach vocabulary in their content area and 87 percent thought teachers needed more professional development to teach literacy effectively.<sup>25</sup> The most strategic state literacy plans recognize the increasing literacy-related instructional demands placed on educators. These plans establish practices and policies that provide relevant and research-based preservice training and professional development for teachers and administrators.

Recent publications suggest that a leadership model for secondary school and district leaders to support adolescent literacy should include implementing a literacy plan, supporting teachers to improve instruction, engaging in data-based decisionmaking, building leadership capacity, and allocating resources.<sup>26</sup> These leaders must also be responsible for making certain that literacy development occurs across the content areas. Though content area teachers in middle and high schools are not expected to be “reading” teachers, they do need to know how to teach their students the reading and writing skills of their disciplines.<sup>27</sup> Especially at the secondary level, the literacy demands of specific subjects (e.g., how to read and write a lab report or interpret an historical document) must be articulated, and subject-area teachers need to know how to teach these skills.

To make the best decisions about how to address student literacy needs, educators need timely and accurate data about students’ difficulties. Policymakers too require information about what programs successfully ramp up student performance. Better assessment information at the state, local, and classroom levels can provide a solid foundation for literacy-related policy and practice decisions.<sup>28</sup>

## **STATE POLICIES FOR PROMOTING STATEWIDE K-12 LITERACY**

This brief enhances the original recommendations and policy strategies offered in *Reading to Achieve: A Governor’s Guide to Adolescent Literacy* with examples and lessons from recent research and state practice.<sup>29</sup> As did the governor’s guide, this brief recommends five policy strategies to states for improving adolescent literacy:

1. Build support for a state focus on adolescent literacy;
2. Raise literacy expectations across the curriculum;
3. Encourage and support school and district literacy plans;
4. Build educators’ capacity to provide adolescent literacy instruction; and
5. Measure progress in adolescent literacy at the school, district and state levels.

### **1. Build Support for a State Focus on Adolescent Literacy**

Governors have built support for a focus on adolescent literacy by charging stakeholders to develop policies and practice recommendations in response to identified needs. They have established entities to implement these adolescent literacy policy solutions and have launched communications campaigns to champion the need for new approaches to raising adolescent literacy achievement.

***Engage stakeholders to develop adolescent literacy policy recommendations.*** With NGA Center grant support, **Massachusetts, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, and North Carolina** convened groups of key stakeholders and expert advisors to devise state plans to focus on adolescent literacy. To develop these plans, stakeholder groups reviewed existing policies, examined student performance data, and sought guidance from research and best practices.

Governors seeking to devise state plans tapped individuals representing relevant constituencies and with knowledge about state literacy needs. Massachusetts's Adolescent Literacy Task Force included representatives from the governor's office, K-12 and postsecondary education, the legislature, business, and philanthropic organizations. The task force developed a prekindergarten through grade 12 literacy plan with five recommendations to accomplish by 2011.<sup>30</sup> Task force members included not only individuals who specialize in reading and literacy but also, for example, representatives of the science and math teachers' associations who can be instrumental in meeting one of the commonwealth's goals of ensuring that curriculum frameworks in all content areas reflect disciplinary literacy skills. Delaware's task force of teachers, reading specialists, administrators, state agency staff, higher education representatives, and community members developed the statewide approach based on a policy audit. In response to the audit results, the task force designed a literacy plan template for districts and charter schools.

Stakeholder groups often develop plans based upon a review of state data, needs, and past practices. Florida's workgroup developed a recommended five-year strategic work plan for middle and secondary literacy. Some of these recommendations have already been implemented, such as establishing an annually recurring categorical fund for reading and securing the state reading office in statute. To begin their planning, the workgroup reviewed the state's existing K-12 reading plan with the intent of determining the level of coordination among and effectiveness of the state's multiple reading initiatives. Idaho's Middle Grades Task Force paid particular attention to the literacy needs of students in grades six through grades eight. The group recommended devising plans for intervention for struggling readers, requiring additional literacy instruction in preservice education, and issuing a public report card with literacy indicators.<sup>31</sup> North Carolina's *Strategic Plan for Reading Literacy* proposes six priority action steps for policy and practice to prepare students for reading and digital literacy. The plan's six steps include a review of literacy requirements for K-8 licensure and intervention procedures for middle and high school struggling readers.<sup>32</sup>

***Establish a statewide entity to implement adolescent literacy policies.*** States that have been leaders in establishing effective early literacy programs and offices, such as **Alabama** and **Florida**, have also been some of the most innovative and effective in devising policy responses to extend literacy programs to students in grades four and above. After implementing the Alabama Reading Initiative and establishing the Just Read, Florida! office, both of these states realized gains on their fourth-grade NAEP reading scores. Yet both also saw lagging performance among their eighth-graders' reading achievement. Leaders and supporters of these established programs made the case, using data and positive results from past approaches, for the state to extend the benefits of their investments in K-3 literacy by devising and supporting new approaches to adolescent literacy.

Alabama established the Adolescent Literacy Advisory Council to make recommendations for the Alabama Reading Initiative-Project for Adolescent Literacy (ARI-PAL). The council gathered information about effective adolescent literacy practices and recommended policies such as the ARI summer training sessions and use of technology to expand professional development opportunities beyond the initial group of ARI schools, only some of which were secondary level. The expansion of ARI to secondary schools drew upon results from an evaluation of the initial set of secondary schools whose teachers and reading coaches had adapted the original one-size-fits-all reading model to the needs of adolescent learners.<sup>33</sup> In-state and national reading experts addressed the council and offered advice about how to tailor the program to secondary schools. Since their start in 2006-2007, the initial group of ARI-PAL schools made overall greater gains than comparison schools.<sup>34</sup>

To implement their policies, both **Florida** and **Ohio** appointed adolescent reading coordinators in their state education agencies. Established in 2001, the Just Read, Florida! office manages the state's strategic plan for literacy across the K-12 continuum. As the focus on reading in the state has evolved, the state's plan has begun to focus more on the needs of older readers and the benefits of specialized certifications, and has been instrumental in providing the supports teachers require (e.g., reviews of reading programs, trainings on areas of identified need). Other states, such as **Louisiana**, **Michigan**, and **Rhode Island** have recognized the importance of literacy instruction to overarching high school improvement initiatives and have built literacy components into regular meetings of agency departments (e.g., reading, assessment, curriculum and instruction) and into their high school redesign agendas.

*Engage in an adolescent literacy communications campaign.* Governors, such as those in **Arizona** and **North Carolina**, have led statewide conversations and initiatives that have raised awareness among policymakers and the public about the importance of a focus on literacy.

In recognition of the critical link between literacy performance and postsecondary and career success, Arizona's P-20 Council established an adolescent literacy subcommittee to communicate about the issue, evaluate literacy performance statewide, and recommend policies and practices to raise literacy achievement. Arizona has promoted the importance of adolescent literacy by holding regional summits on the subject, using these summits as an opportunity to raise public awareness of the state's literacy crisis, hear the latest research and effective approaches from reading experts, gather information about current teacher literacy practices, and solicit feedback on state literacy plan recommendations.

A component of the state's P-20 council, Arizona's adolescent literacy subcommittee, oversaw data collection through a survey administered at the regional summits and conducted a state inventory of district use of diagnostic assessments. In response to the survey and audit findings, the state created and distributed to middle grade teachers an instructional toolkit designed to help them incorporate literacy instruction in their classrooms and identify students in need of intervention. Expanding on a book program begun in 2003 by former Governor Janet Napolitano, Arizona, in partnership with private sponsors, now distributes a book to every first- and fourth-grader in the state. The program promotes the importance and love of reading among Arizona students.

North Carolina has also benefitted from the governor's promotion of the state's attention to improving adolescent literacy outcomes. Former North Carolina Governor Mike Easley publicized the Governor's 21st Century Literacy Coach Initiative with a video describing why he established the initiative. The governor also included a link on his Web site to another video about the structure and benefits of the literacy coach program as described by coaches and teachers themselves.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the North Carolina State Board of Education added licensure endorsement for literacy coaches receiving this two-year training as a way to promote expansion across the state as teachers move to other schools. Finally, the state has also engaged students in its literacy awareness campaign by conducting a statewide contest for high school computer application students to design literacy-themed materials.

## **2. Raise Literacy Expectations Across the Curriculum**

To ensure that their students are prepared for the literacy expectations of employers and postsecondary institutions, governors are supporting efforts to set state standards that reflect real-

world demands. As states modify their standards to reflect these demands, they will also need to revise assessment systems accordingly to measure student progress toward these goals.

**Raise state standards across grades and curricula to meet real-world literacy demands.** Simply taking high school courses with the right titles does not mean students are mastering the knowledge and skills they need for college success. More students are now taking the minimum recommended core curriculum—four years of English and three years each of mathematics, science, and social studies—yet only one-quarter of these students are successful in entry-level college courses.<sup>36</sup> Many of these students lack the extensive experience reading complex texts in high school that is critical to their mastery of college-level reading skills. Students who are prepared for college-level reading are more likely to be successful in not only English but also other college courses including math, science, and social sciences. Furthermore, facility with college-level reading contributes to other aspects of college success as well (e.g., these students enroll in college immediately after high school, return to the same institution for a second year of college, and earn higher grades).<sup>37</sup>

Though the ability to read complex texts makes a big difference in students' preparation for college, most states fail to define the types of reading high school students should read in content-area courses.<sup>38</sup> In addition to recommending specific types of reading requirements, states can serve their students well, experts say, by requiring more reading in the post-primary grade levels and ensuring that advanced literacy instruction is embedded within content-area classes.<sup>39</sup> States are beginning to respond to this dilemma by being more explicit about the literacy expectations for students in these courses.

According to Achieve, Inc., 19 states have adopted college and career-ready English language arts standards, and an additional 24 states are in the process of setting their standards to align with the demands of colleges and businesses.<sup>40</sup> Some states have done this work on their own, but the majority have worked with Achieve, Inc. to ensure their standards are of high quality and align with expectations for college and work.

According to Achieve, Inc.'s *Closing the Expectations Gap*, findings that can be useful to states seeking to strengthen their literacy expectations include:

- Although high school English standards and courses tend to emphasize literature, most of the reading students will encounter in college or on the job is informational in nature (e.g., textbooks, manuals, articles, briefs and essays).
- Most of the writing students will perform in college and work is for the purpose of informing or persuading, often requiring students to use evidence to support a position. The ability to research is also cited as an important skill for college and work. State standards tend to give these types of writing short shrift, emphasizing narrative writing instead.
- The ability to work in teams and orally present one's work is cited by professors and employers as critical for success. State standards do not always sufficiently address these skills.<sup>41</sup>

Writing is another strong predictor of academic success that state policymakers can make sure is better integrated into state standards. A meta-analysis of research on writing recommends 11 key elements of effective writing instruction that states should consider as they revamp their literacy standards and curricula.<sup>42</sup>

**Ensure literacy expectations are measured regularly.** Making changes to the academic standards will likely require subsequent changes to a state’s assessment system. **Massachusetts’s** task force recommended updating the state’s curriculum frameworks and related documents to ensure that they reflect current research recommendations regarding the language and literacy skills that pre-K—12 students need to comprehend and communicate meaning across the content areas. The state has begun to revise the English Language Arts Curriculum Framework by grade level to ensure that attention is given to the reading and writing of expository text. The task force also recommended that future revisions to the other content area curriculum frameworks include explicit references to the integration of disciplinary literacy skills and content area knowledge. With respect to assessment, the task force recommended revisions to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) to reflect approved changes to the frameworks and/or policy related to test content and emphasis. It also recommended development and dissemination of state guidance on the local use of literacy-related formative assessments to gauge student progress, over time, toward proficiency, and promoting the use of formative assessment practices to inform instructional decisionmaking, especially as related to the reading and writing of discipline-specific texts.

### **3. Encourage and Support School and District Literacy Plans**

Literacy plans provide guidance for districts and schools about how to ensure that they deliver instruction that helps students master reading, writing, and communications skills. For these plans to be effective, they must be tied to literacy performance data and linked to state standards. The plans must also be aligned to curricula, assessments, and professional development activities. Additionally, the plans should be based on real-time school data and draw upon research-based practices for teaching literacy skills. States can help to ensure the success of these plans by making sure they also incorporate state expectations about how low-performing students will be identified and what interventions will be provided for under-performing readers.<sup>43</sup>

**Devise a school or district literacy plan template.** States such as **Delaware** and **Florida** have designed templates that can be used for literacy planning. These plans align to state standards and assessments and take into account other requirements such improvement plans for under-performing schools. Some of these literacy plans include recommended or required steps for providing interventions to the lowest-performing students in a school or district. Simply developing a plan will not guarantee improved student performance, but providing guidance for districts and schools can help a school take action strategically.<sup>44</sup>

With its *Reading to Achieve* grant, **Delaware** devised literacy plan rubrics and tools for districts and schools to develop their own pre-K through twelfth-grade literacy programs. These rubrics call upon district and school leaders to consider five dimensions of a quality literacy program (i.e., curriculum/instruction, leadership, assessment, professional development, partnerships). The rubrics allow educators to measure the school or district’s current approach on each of these factors and to then set targets for program improvement. These school literacy plans then serve to inform schools’ improvement plans as well as each district’s strategic plan.<sup>45</sup>

**Florida** requires school districts to submit a K-12 comprehensive research-based reading plan to access state reading funds. The district plan must ensure the provision of:

- Highly qualified reading coaches;
- Professional development for school district teachers in scientifically based reading instruction, including strategies to teach reading in content areas and with an emphasis on technical and informational text;

- Summer reading camps for students who score at Level 1 on the state reading assessment;
- Supplemental instructional materials that are grounded in scientifically based reading research; and
- Intensive interventions for middle and high school students reading below grade level.

With a federal Striving Readers grant, the **Kentucky** Content Literacy Consortium of 23 rural middle schools and high schools and seven school districts is piloting schoolwide literacy models intended to help secondary-level students read at higher levels and is testing intervention models.

*Require interventions for the lowest-performing students.* Though interventions may be a part of an overall school or district literacy plan, it is important that states are deliberate in establishing requirements to identify and assist struggling readers. If students with reading difficulties are identified and assisted appropriately, governors may see boosts in student achievement. Recent findings from an early impact study of two supplemental literacy programs to improve reading comprehension skills and school performance of struggling ninth-grade readers offer promise that if implemented well, such supports may have positive impacts on student literacy achievement.<sup>46</sup>

The limitations of available adolescent literacy assessments prove a challenge for state as well as district school leaders who seek to identify secondary-level students in need of intervention.<sup>47</sup> Despite these limitations, governors can call for a screening of some key skills and factors to determine why a student performed poorly on state assessments. Additionally, states may use this information to inform educators and policymakers about deficits and progress across the state and how the state might best use resources to address the problems identified by the data.<sup>48</sup>

Originally required only for students in K-5, **Rhode Island** now requires Personal Literacy Plans for students in grades K-12 who are reading three or more years below grade level or who qualify for direct reading instruction from a certified reading specialist. In addition, Rhode Island schools' literacy plans must include information about the methods and approaches for providing assistance to students reading below grade level, with the level of intensity of support increasing to respond to the students' deficits.

#### **4. Build Educators' Capacity to Provide Adolescent Literacy Instruction**

Providing educators with the knowledge and skills to prepare their students for college and workplace expectations requires states to develop a strategy for building instructional capacity. States can take a number of steps to ensure teachers have materials, tools, training, and support to provide effective literacy instruction. States have developed professional development curricula, created new teacher training and certification requirements, and employed literacy coaching initiatives.

*Develop a professional development curriculum.* Ramping up students' literacy skills depends in large part upon their teachers' ability to infuse literacy instruction into content area courses. It is important to note, however, that content area teachers should not be required to provide basic reading instruction. Students in grades four through twelve who are reading many years behind require the help of specially trained reading specialists or teachers.<sup>49</sup> Content area teachers should be supported in learning literacy strategies that will help students master the material in their courses, such as how to read data charts for a science class or how to conduct research to inform a

debate in social studies class.

States can address this critical need by developing a stand-alone or literacy-focused aspect of the overall professional development curricula. Many states have partnered with higher education institutions and other experts to provide direct professional development, create materials or review curricula. The Council of Chief State School Officers produced an adolescent literacy toolkit with the guidance of a number of state education officials and leading literacy researchers. This toolkit is designed to provide states with resources for establishing professional development for secondary teachers that integrates literacy best practices into their English language arts, math, science and social studies instruction.<sup>50</sup>

**Kentucky**, with the leadership of a number of university and district partners, for example, has developed a wealth of professional development resources, training programs, and research projects to support K-12 literacy.<sup>51</sup> The Collaborative Center for Literacy Development (CCLD), funded initially in 1998 by the General Assembly and representing educators from eight university and colleges, has run a series of adolescent literacy projects as well as training and research programs. Since the establishment of the CCLD, Kentucky has been awarded a Striving Readers grant by the United States Department of Education and established an Adolescent Literacy Coaching program in which teachers can earn up to 12 graduate credit hours. With a grant from the National Association of State Boards of Education, the state is working to connect the variety of adolescent literacy projects underway across the state into a unified state literacy plan.<sup>52</sup>

In recognition that teachers of middle grades students need an intensive, research-based approach to address the “middle grades drop-off,” **New Jersey** developed a middle grades literacy model, Literacy is Essential for Adolescent Development and Success (LEADS). The state-endorsed LEADS model has been implemented in fourteen school districts. The New Jersey Department of Education has provided training and coaching through literacy specialists, developed a comprehensive training manual along with a DVD, and plans to launch a LEADS website. The state is also developing an English Language Learner (ELL) matrix to extend the model for use in districts with significant ELL populations. **Michigan**’s adolescent literacy program, Michigan’s Mission Possible, provides a collection of resources for supporting adolescent literacy. One goal of the initiative is to provide adolescent literacy training for all middle and high school teachers through the state’s eight Regional Literacy Training Centers.<sup>53</sup>

**Alabama**’s extension and modification of its reading initiative for adolescents, Alabama Reading Initiative, Project for Adolescent Literacy (ARI-PAL) is in large part a professional development program. Though the ARI-PAL includes intervention classes for students reading below grade level, the initiative intends to enhance content-area teachers’ literacy instruction by assigning each site a literacy coach to work directly with secondary school teachers in planning, practicing, and reviewing the literacy-related aspects of their instruction. The ARI-PAL program is based in the state department of education, which trains regional coaches and site-based literacy coaches.

One step states can take to make sure that instructional materials are likely to produce positive results is to establish expert panels to conduct reviews of materials and curricula. New Jersey has used these reviews and the state’s K-12 reading model to set the parameters for acceptable school and district plans.

***Create a teacher training or recertification curriculum.*** By developing teacher training or certification that reflects the most current research findings on adolescent literacy, governors can position their teaching force to employ effective instructional techniques. State leaders may also

consider coupling such training and certification with incentives for teachers with the best honed skills to teach the students who are most in need of help. For example, **Texas** provides \$5,000 incentives to certified master reading teachers who agree to work in high-needs schools.

**Arizona** recently implemented new reading endorsements for grades K-8 and grades 6-12, which require the completion of 24 credit hours beyond the B.A./B.S. degree, including 21 course credits and one 3-credit applied project in the field of reading. Individuals wishing to earn a K-12 endorsement will complete both elementary *and* secondary courses, resulting in a total of 30 course credits. To pursue the reading endorsement, a teacher must hold a B.A. or B.S. degree in education and have a minimum of three years of teaching experience. To encourage more teachers in high-poverty schools and rural areas to attain this endorsement, the Arizona P-20 Council instituted the Teacher Reading Endorsement Scholarship program. The program offers scholarships of up to \$2,500. This opportunity was promoted at a state reading seminar and through a literacy toolkit the council produced for middle grades teachers.<sup>54</sup>

***Employ a literacy coach model.*** An increasingly popular state approach to supporting teachers in delivering effective literacy instruction is the “literacy coach.” States employ multiple models of “literacy coaches.” These coaches sometimes work exclusively with teachers to give them practice and support tailoring instruction to their students. This coaching often includes model teaching in classrooms, assisting teachers in administering and interpreting assessments, and providing practice with new resource materials. In some cases literacy coaches work directly with students with reading difficulties. In response to the rise in popularity of this approach, three national organizations developed a set of standards for middle and high school literacy coaches, which states can use to guide the development of their programs.<sup>55</sup>

Through the Governor's 21st Century Literacy Coach Initiative, **North Carolina** provides literacy coaches to 200 middle schools to provide on-going, relevant professional development, coaching, and mentoring, tailored to the specific needs of each individual teacher on staff. Each school's peer-elected improvement team selects the school's literacy coach, who undergoes extensive two-year training through the North Carolina Teacher Academy. The Initiative began in 2006 by placing literacy coaches in the state's 100 lowest-performing schools and now requires schools to apply to receive a coach and prioritizes middle schools that feed into the state's most at-risk high schools.<sup>56</sup> North Carolina is investing approximately \$10 million in the 200 positions. Additionally, former Governor Mike Easley signed a budget that allows a National Board certified teacher to retain the 12 percent salary bonus if hired as a literacy coach.

A study of **Florida's** statewide middle schools reading coach program by RAND Corporation yielded findings that are important for states considering a coaching model. The study found that coaching in general had mixed results on student achievement but identified a significant but small relationship between a focus on reviewing assessment data with teachers and student performance. Teachers and principals reported that literacy coaches had a positive effect on instructional practice and that the most effective coaches were well equipped to support adult learners. The study recommends that states can strengthen the coaching model by developing a pipeline of qualified candidates, encouraging administrator support for coaching, providing ongoing professional development for coaches, encouraging coaches to focus on data reviews with teachers, and minimizing non-coaching duties.<sup>57</sup>

## 5. Measure Progress at the Student, School, District and State Levels

States will want to continually assess the impact of their new policies and programs on student

learning. Additionally, as new research in the literacy field emerges, states will want to take these findings into consideration as they modify their policies. Two of the state leaders in setting comprehensive K-12 literacy plans over a number of years, **Florida** and **Alabama**, have engaged in evaluations of their approaches.

Florida's extensive and comprehensive statewide reading program is informed by research and studies conducted by the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) and other entities. In 2002, in tandem with the Just Read, Florida! office, the governor established FCRR at Florida State University to conduct and disseminate reading research on pre-K through grade 12 reading. The state has also commissioned research on the effectiveness of literacy-related professional development and the cost of providing education for the lowest-performing students who score at the bottom two levels on the state assessment.

In the development and refinement of its reading initiative, Alabama has modeled effective use of evaluation to inform policies and program design. The secondary portion of the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) program has undergone multiple revisions based upon feedback and lessons learned from evaluations and research of ARI.<sup>58</sup>

#### **Lessons from the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) to Inform a Focus on Adolescent Literacy**

A study of the secondary school component of ARI offers lessons for states developing and refining their K-12 literacy initiatives. The study conducted by the American Institutes of Research and funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York suggests that states:

- **Consider the distinct needs of elementary and secondary schools and their students.** The study found that a one-size-fits-all model will not work across K-12. The approach originally designed in 1998 for early literacy needed to be tailored to secondary school needs. ARI leaders developed separate materials, professional development programs, and instructional strategies for secondary schools.
- **Facilitate partnerships across K-12 schools and educators.** ARI leaders realized that the benefits of the early grade gains were best sustained when the initiative included a coherent continuum of reading instruction across the grade levels. Teachers need “common language” to discuss goals and strategies for students’ reading.
- **Provide secondary teachers and schools consistent support from specialized staff.** According to teachers, administrators, and others involved in ARI, assistance for secondary teachers from those with secondary-specific expertise was most helpful in supporting teachers of adolescents. Finding leaders and educators with these skills, though, can be a challenge.
- **Attend to the policy environment and potential funding sources.** ARI administrators reported that attention to conversations at the local, state and national policy levels helped them identify funding for their initiative.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Over the past few years, governors and state leaders have begun to acknowledge and address the importance of an adolescent literacy agenda to capitalize on early literacy gains. From just a few states with comprehensive statewide K-12 literacy plans a few years ago, the number of states introducing new policies and initiatives to support adolescent literacy has increased. Still, states have a long way to go to institute the spectrum of changes that will be required to realize long-term and substantial progress: strong professional development programs, application of literacy research, district and school literacy plans, and a coordination of all of these elements. An additional challenge to states is the loss of funds for the federal Reading First program, which could result in limitations of investments in early as well as adolescent literacy. Nevertheless, in

just a few years, the research and practice base has grown. There is promise that state leaders' attention to literacy will likely pay dividends not only in reading and other academic achievement scores, but also in students' abilities to master the communication skills critical to success in school and in life. As states begin to implement their K-12 plans, they will need to measure the impact and progress of their new policies and programs so they can continue to promote, refine, and expand the most beneficial approaches. Lessons learned from these initial K-12 statewide literacy plans provide guidance for other states seeking to following in their innovative footsteps.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>27</sup> Rafael Heller and Cynthia Greenleaf, *Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas: Getting to the Core of Middle and High School Improvement* (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007).

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<http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0609MIDLITERACYSUMM.PDF>;

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