

Webcast From The Appalachia Regional Comprehensive
Center at Edvantia

“The State Role in Addressing the Adolescent Literacy
Crisis”

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John ROSS, Moderator

Good afternoon, and welcome to all of you joining us this afternoon for the second 2006 Webcast from the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center (ARCC) at Edvantia. I'm John Ross, your moderator today. And on behalf of The Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center and our partner organization, the Center for Equity and

Excellence in Education (CEEE) at George Washington University, we want to welcome participants across the region and the nation.

Our focus today is the state role in addressing the adolescent literacy crisis. And yes, you heard the word “crisis” in the title. Let me share some quick statistics with you as we begin. Approximately 70% of our nation’s teens and “tweens” struggle to read. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows that two thirds, 66%, of our 8th and 12th graders are reading below the proficient level. One fourth, that’s 25%, cannot read at even the most basic level. For African American and Latino students, the situation is even more dire. Nearly 50% of these students read below basic level.

Our state agency leaders are critical in addressing the national challenge by taking a more active role in developing literacy programs for students in Grades 4 through 12. And that’s the purpose of our webcast today. Our guest experts will provide information, recommendations, and proven strategies to give state education staff members important information and insight about your roles, responsibilities, and opportunities in addressing this urgent national priority.

Today we have the special opportunity to hear a variety of perspectives, and our conversation involves you as well. We have two **polling questions** during the webcast, and you’ll also have the chance to submit questions for our panelists. We will answer these questions during the final time slot of the broadcast.

Our agenda today will include an introduction from **Trenace Richardson and Kris Anstrom**, from the George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education. They will help define adolescent literacy and the factors associated with low literacy skills in Grades 4 through 12.

Then we’ll view an interview with **Melvina Phillips** from the Alabama Reading Initiative and **principal author** of “Creating a Culture of Literacy.” She will share adolescent literacy trends and challenges from across the nation. We have three panelists with us today: **Renee Murray** from the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), **Eunice Greer** from Scholastic, and **Evan Lefsky** from “Just Read, Florida!”

They’ll each offer their unique perspectives, and then we’ll have a moderated panel discussion. Any time during our discussion, please e-mail your questions to us using the prompt on the webcast screen. Be sure to include your e-mail address in the body of your question, so, in the event we cannot answer your question during the webcast, we can respond to it following today’s event.

We’ll launch our conversation today with a presentation from **Trenace Richardson and Kris Anstrom** from the George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education. **Trenace currently serves as the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center’s Maryland State Coordinator for Technical Assistance.** She’s an award-winning classroom teacher and noted researcher at the George

Washington University. She also comanages **the National Institute for Literacy's Adolescent Literacy Grant.**

Kris Anstrom serves as the **Assistant Director of the Center for Equity and Excellence in Education.** She brings unique expertise in teaching English language learners and in designing more inclusive curricula and learning environments for these students. She is a noted author, having recently completed an English language learners literacy textbook titled, "Keys to Learning." Trenace?

Trenace RICHARDSON, Research Associate, George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education

Thank you, John. For the purposes of this webcast, adolescent literacy refers to the skills and abilities students in Grades 4 through 12 need to read, write, and think about the text they encounter. This discussion will focus primarily on reading and, to a lesser extent, on writing. Texts students encounter can include, but are not limited to, traditional written materials, such as grade-level texts, magazine articles, poetry, directions for conducting experiments, and mathematical tables. They also can include electronic multi-media text, such as Web sites and electronic discussion lists.

Adolescent literacy also encompasses the development of discipline-specific literacy skills that are needed to understand unique organizational patterns and concepts found in academic text. Examples of discipline-specific reading could be a mathematical table or formula or a history textbook chapter that outlines, for example, the purposes of the Lewis and Clark expedition and the chronology and the effects of that expedition.

Kris ANDSTROM, Assistant Director, George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education

Now, let's turn to some barriers that can impede adolescents from developing the literacy skills they will need to read and write academic texts. The first barrier is that many adolescents experience a decline in motivation for reading during their adolescent years: changes in beliefs, values, and goals that occur in the adolescent years become important barriers for them in terms of their interest in reading and writing. For example, for many adolescents, personal pursuits outside of school become more important, leading to more interest in such activities as surfing the Internet and sending and receiving e-mail, and less interest in traditional reading materials, such as books and magazines.

A second barrier is that more time in middle and high school is focused on covering the curriculum. This leaves little time for teachers to develop students' vocabulary and the background knowledge they will need to learn new content. Struggling readers, many of whom are English language learners and special education students in particular, need extra time and support to develop these vocabulary skills and background knowledge.

The third barrier is that there is an increase in the complexity and amount of reading and writing that students will encounter as they advance through their grade levels.

Fourth, there is little or no instruction in literacy skills and strategies at the middle and high school levels: specific comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary skills that are needed to read and write different kinds of text are not incorporated into the curriculum.

Finally, many middle and high school teachers do not view reading and writing instruction as their responsibility. One reason for this may be that middle and high school teachers typically receive little training in adolescent literacy.

Trenace RICHARDSON

To address adequately these barriers educators, researchers, and policymakers need to better understand the changes and interventions needed at the school, district, and state levels to increase literacy among adolescents. This webcast is specifically focused on the role the state can play in addressing this crisis. The good news is that some state education agencies have already begun wrestling with this issue, and they have lessons learned to share.

So what does a state education agency need to adequately address the adolescent literacy issues they face in their states today? We hope to offer up practical solutions in the form of strategies, recommendations, and resources to confront the real challenges states face in dealing with the adolescent literacy crisis. John?

John ROSS

Trenace, Kris, thanks so much for the terrific introduction to our topic today. Let's take advantage of the technology at our disposal this afternoon, and we'll do our first opinion poll. To respond to this question, use the polling function on your webcast screen. Our first question is, "My state education agency has a clear plan in place to address adolescent literacy." Do you, strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with this question? Or are you unaware of plans your state agency has for addressing adolescent literacy? We'll report on the results after the next segment.

And now, I'm pleased to introduce **Dr. Melvina Phillips**. Dr. Phillips is a retired educator and currently serves as a secondary literacy consultant with the **National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)** and the Alabama State Department of Education. She's been a principal, assistant principal, classroom teacher, and a district leader. She's also one of the nation's leading lights in the special field of adolescent literacy. For NASSP, she created an adolescent literacy handbook for principals funded by the Carnegie Foundation.

Dr. Phillips is the ideal educator to set the stage for a renaissance in reading success for adolescents. Dr. Phillips sat down recently with **ARCC staff consultant and literacy expert Georgeanne Oxnam**, in an interview in Nashville, Tennessee. She's in the midst of a busy travel schedule, but had time to address the question, "What can states do to meet the challenges of promoting successful adolescent literacy programs?"

Dr. Melvina PHILLIPS, Alabama Reading Initiative

When we begin to look at trends that impact adolescent literacy, I think the statistics are quite alarming. If we look at the National Assessment of Educational Progress, we know that 40-50% of some of our minority groups are reading at the basic or below basic level, whereas 10% of the Whites or Pacific Islanders are only scoring at the basic level, and they're much higher. So, what does this indicate to us when we begin to look at the large urban areas, or large urban districts?

We also know that when we look at statistics, much of our **reading instruction ends at 3rd or 4th grade**. Now what happens to those students who are adolescent learners, and they begin to move to the middle school and the high school? Since literacy instruction has ended, they do not have the skills to interact with the tough expository text that they find in their science books—the descriptive text that they are engaged with. So, it's much different from reading a narrative text. And even though they can call each word on the page, they do not have the capability or capacity to comprehend what they're reading.

So, it's critical, when we look at adolescent literacy, to ask what can we do as a state to ensure that every school, whether it's in a large urban area or a school that is in a rural community, so that we can build the capacity of leaders and teachers within our state to support adolescent literacy across all content areas, so that our adolescent learners are actually successful, and graduate from high school, and are prepared for university as well as the work force. And the only way we're going to get there is to improve the literacy skills of each individual.

Now when we begin to look at what states can do, we know that there are **five core areas** that are very important, that we focus on those five core areas. And I'd just like to take the time to name those if I may, and then I'll go back and spend a little time on each one. But it's important when we look at leadership, **building the capacity of our school leaders**, and this includes the principal, or the instructional leader of the school, as well as the literacy coaches and the content teachers within the school.

How do we begin to build leadership in order to support improved adolescent literacy opportunities? Looking at **understanding assessment**, how do we take the assessment results that we have put such emphasis on during the past few years and really develop a true understanding of that assessment so that it guides not only instruction, but also guides the professional development that we are focusing on to improve adolescent literacy?

And, as I mentioned, **professional development** is very important because most of our secondary folks do not have the background or the professional knowledge to know how to truly integrate literacy instruction into the delivery of content. So, professional development is key, but not just the one-shot deal.

But how do we provide that ongoing, job-embedded professional development so that teachers actually become strategic teachers? They actually, when they go into their classroom, they know how to model literacy practices that will actually support the adolescent learners, so that they do comprehend that tough expository text that I mentioned.

How does the classroom teacher make connections with **pre-, during, and post-literacy strategies** so that students will begin to activate their prior knowledge, set a purpose for reading, engage with the text and the text structure, using graphic organizers to help them organize their thoughts as they're reading? And then, of course, to go with the post-reading strategy, how do they really begin to focus on the reading-writing connection, or making the reading-writing connection? How do they extend their thinking through other strategies that are connected to that text that they have just finished?

And then understanding what we must do for **intervention**—how do we help our schools understand that when we talk about adolescent literacy, it's not just for the struggling readers. Yes, we need extended time for literacy and additional intervention classes to support those struggling readers, but we also need to improve the reading capacity, or expand the reading power of those students that are at the very upper end of the spectrum according to ability.

So, adolescent literacy is changing a mind-set within the school, and supporting our school leaders, our principals, as well as our students—because the students are at the very heart of everything that we want to do within our schools.

Now, how can states support that? I can share one model, because I'm very familiar with the Alabama Reading Initiative. But this began at the state level through the efforts of Dr. Katherine Mitchell. She pulled together a group of experts to begin with, and they spent a year reading all of the latest research connected with literacy and what works to improve literacy of students. And, of course, that centers around providing the framework, the support, to teachers, for them to know what to do, and that comes through professional development.

And within the state, this initially began with the reading academies, and those were two-week reading academies. And the schools that went through had to commit to 85% of their faculty attending that very intensive professional development. Now what type of support are we going to provide after the reading academy—that really became crucial. Because you can have those strategies but then you've got to implement, and how are you going to do that?

And so, again, the state worked with providing state and regional literacy coaches that work with district and school literacy coaches so that we have this ongoing modeling of successful literacy practices. And then the school literacy coaches work with the teachers within the school. This is one way to build capacity of teachers, through the coaching model. But what about the school leaders? Because we know, according to the Wallace

Foundation, that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction to improving student achievement.

And again, within the state, we have principal academies, or leadership academies that support the literacy leadership team at each of the schools. This is inclusive of working with the principal in separate professional development opportunities, but now we have moved from just the separate work with the principal to also including the leaders of the Literacy Leadership Team, which is normally composed of the principal, the literacy coach, and content teachers.

And so, you have the principal academies that are supporting principals as they try to become true instructional leaders. Then you have the leadership teams that are working on improving leadership capacity within the school as they go forth with an adolescent literacy initiative. And then, within the state, we also have separate literacy coach meetings so that the regional literacy coaches are working with the school and the district literacy coaches.

When we begin to think of the Alabama Reading Initiative model, it's really like a pyramid. It begins at the state department, and then grows to the regions, and then to the districts, and to the individual schools, and the classroom, and to the students. It has a great impact on student achievement.

But, I'd like to reiterate that there are five key areas that really must be in place. And they are:

- Committed Leadership
- The Wise Use of Assessment
- Professional Development
- Classroom Instruction
- Strategic Accelerated Intervention

John ROSS

We are so fortunate to have the opportunity to hear Dr. Phillips today, and we're genuinely appreciative. Let's share the results of our first Web poll now. Our first question was, "My state education agency has a clear plan in place to address adolescent literacy." Twenty-one percent of the people who responded strongly agree with that, as well as 50% agreed. Only 14% disagreed, and 14% were not quite aware of whether plans are in place in their state. Thank you for all of your responses. They were a great help.

In this section of the program, we are pleased to have three distinguished panelists. They'll each provide a short presentation that addresses a specific component of **adolescent literacy and states' involvement**. Following a few remarks from each panelist, we'll open the floor to your e-mail questions in an interactive discussion.

We'll begin with **Renee Murray, consultant to the Southern Regional Education Board**. Renee is a noted school improvement consultant. She's published several articles, coached more than 50 secondary schools in the process of improvement, and she's presented more than 100 workshops on literacy, proficiency, and school change. An educator and a communication specialist, Renee will talk today about building capacity for literacy instruction and essential literacy skills for adolescents, as well as support systems to help unprepared students achieve success in secondary school. Renee?

Renee MURRAY, Southern Regional Education Board

Thank you, John. It's no surprise to you to know that most of our students are not leaving middle grades ready for high school in their reading and writing skills. While estimates vary, only about a fourth to a third of our students are really ready for what they need in high school, and those numbers are no higher when they leave high school to go to college.

Yet, according to our surveys, about 91% of the students leave middle grades expecting to go on to post-secondary schools. Students know they're not ready. When we surveyed freshmen at 65 schools across the country last year, we found that only 40% of those students were enrolled in something called College Preparatory English. And only about half of them realized at the end of their freshman year that they had had the necessary reading and writing skills to be ready for what they'd just experienced.

So why does the problem exist? As we work with teachers at about 1,600 schools across 39 states, we find some very common problems. That is, we have very complacent teachers who don't recognize that students can do the level of work necessary for proficiency. Many times, those teachers simply don't understand what proficiency looks like. They know that they have state standards but they don't understand what students really need to know, and be able to do, to be ready for the next level.

Therefore, they don't know how to give assignments and assessments that accurately measure whether students have those skills. And then, very often, the only time we deal with reading and writing is in English classes. And those teachers are no more prepared than anyone else.

We have found in our work with the Southern Regional Education Board that there are **five basic steps** that we can do **to help schools improve**. And the first is very simple: that's **making literacy a priority across the curriculum**. When our schools adopt five literacy goals, we find improvement almost immediately. And those goals seem to be very simple in terms of what we ask schools to do, but maybe not quite as simple in implementation.

The first of the goals is to ask students to read the equivalent of 25 books across the curriculum every year—all types of materials—and those things will help them understand the content areas. The state of Georgia has adopted this as their statewide standard this year.

Secondly, we ask students to **produce writing in every class every week** that demonstrates what they have learned about the content of that class.

Third, we encourage teachers to **explicitly teach students strategies** in every class that will help them understand the content and communicate their learning.

Fourth, those **papers that are written in all classes should include research.**

Fifth, we simply have to **increase the rigor in our English language arts classes.** As we define College Preparatory English, we look at the standard of students reading the equivalent of eight to ten books in that class, writing a graded paper every week, completing a research paper, and engaging in activities that encourage high-level thinking and high engagement.

So what do you **on the state level** do to encourage this? First of all, **make literacy plans a priority.** Schools need to have a literacy plan for what they are going to do to address these needs. As you're looking at content standards across the state, **make sure that literacy is embedded in the content standards for all areas.** We need to make sure when we're doing **state assessment that it includes the best practices in reading and writing**—so that we have writing that's not only on demand, but writing that's produced over time, such as the Kentucky Assessment. And also, ensuring that our reading assessments include real-world reading and the types of responses that are necessary in the real world, not just academic essay-type responses.

Secondly, and this is the area that we choose to address most often, and that is **provide teachers a toolkit of strategies** that they can use to teach reading, and to teach writing. On the state level, we need to make sure that that's being done—that we're providing the right kind of training, as well as **monitoring** whether schools are using the training that we ask them to use. Teachers don't need a wide wealth of literacy strategies. What they need are a few good strategies that they implement deeply and that someone on the school and district level is monitoring to ensure that those strategies are being used.

We also ask that you consider **modeling these types of literacy strategies** in all of your state meetings and workshops—have people read, have people do things with what they read. Don't just be talking heads. Training can be provided in many ways: Web-based training, on-site training—many different opportunities to provide focus for schools.

We also encourage you to **support the concept of literacy coaching.** Training in and of itself is not the key to change. While it is an important bedstone for what we're doing, it is important that teachers get ongoing support. Our schools that have shown the greatest improvement have efficiently and effectively used literacy coaching on an ongoing basis.

The third strategy we recommend is for you to **help schools align their literacy curriculum:** align to the next level, work going forward rather than backward. What we're finding in our work is that it's important to be aligned to what's really necessary

for the next level—that middle grades align to what’s necessary for high school, and high school is aligned to what’s necessary for college—that those standards illustrate effectively for teachers what’s good enough, not just that the standard says, for instance, “make comparisons and contrasts,” but what “good enough” really looks like.

We need to move beyond the curriculum on the shelf, especially a curriculum that’s given down from the state department to schools, to an **enacted curriculum**. It’s not giving schools curriculum, it’s helping them develop instruction to ensure students meet standards.

Fourth, we simply have to do a better job of **helping English teachers understand what rigor in English looks like**. What we find is that all states require components within the English instruction of reading, writing, research, speaking, listening, technology. But in many schools, only reading, and in some cases writing, is taught because the other standards are not assessed on the state assessment.

We have to move beyond dummy English for some kids, or dummy materials for other kids. We have to be able to get all students in those college preparatory classes in middle grades and high school. What we know in remediation is that it doesn’t work if we’re trying to get remediate students to a lower level. We have to work to get them to competent grade-level readers and writers.

But that requires the fifth step. We have to **provide help for under-prepared students**. We need to be mandating courses for students who are behind. We’ve been in a two-year pilot with our High Schools That Work sites of providing eight schools in three states with help to support a foundation of English, or “power” English course.

After the first year of this one-semester course that students took in the first semester of their freshman year, 87% of the students improved their reading level by at least one grade-level equivalent, and 98% of the students gained the credit in that elective English course, plus their English 9 course. It’s not a magic solution. What we’re finding is that we’re using high-interest materials to teach explicit skills and students are highly engaged in what they’re learning.

The states in which we’ve been most successful have had state leaders at the table with us as we’ve designed instruction. They’ve paved the way into putting this into the core content for the state and have worked actively with us in providing training on a regional basis and ongoing support for these schools.

Finally, let me encourage you to talk to your customers, and by your customers, I mean your students. We’re not just “doing to” students, we’re helping students; we’re “doing with” students as they’re learning to read and write better. Students can tell us what we need to know about what’s happening in the classrooms across our states.

Ask questions on your state assessments like, How often do your teachers show you strategies that help you understand what you’re reading? That information linked to

achievement data gives us great information about what we ought to be doing and can do to help our students.

These aren't necessarily easy steps, nor are they all ones that you are going to implement tomorrow, but they are critical if we hope to have students who are competent readers, writers, and thinkers – those who can understand what they read, and communicate well to others. That's the goal, and that's our job.

John ROSS

Thanks, Renee, for those thoughtful and thought provoking points. We'll turn now to **Dr. Eunice Greer**. Dr. Greer is with **Scholastic**, and serves as the **Director of Content for Professional Development**. She is responsible for the content development for **Scholastic Red**, the breakthrough online and in-person professional development program that supports improved reading instruction at every grade level.

A prominent researcher and reading leader, Dr. Greer was formerly a Senior Research Analyst at the American Institutes for Research in Washington, DC, where she served as Senior Content Advisor for the nationwide implementation of Reading First, along with several other reading assessment projects. She began her career as a classroom teacher and has also worked with the Illinois State Department of Education, the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and the University of Illinois, along with consulting for several leading education organizations. Eunice?

Dr. Eunice GREER, Director of Content for Professional Development, Scholastic

Thanks, John. In the 21st century young people with strong literacy skills will be in demand throughout the country. But it should come as no surprise to you that many of today's students struggle to read and comprehend grade-level text. According to the U.S. Department of Education, more than 8 million students in Grades 4 through 12, or approximately two thirds of middle and high school students, read below grade level.

Now, literacy demands are increasing. Between 1996 and 2006, workplace literacy demands increased by 14% and this trend is expected to continue. Today's students must have the literacy skills needed to tackle the increasingly complex texts they will encounter in post-secondary school and on into the workplace.

Literacy demands are changing. In a digital world students must be able to handle and read many complex texts. They need to be able to use technology to read, to learn, and to communicate. This is a daunting task for students who struggle to read. Now, despite the literacy demands that are increasing, there's been really no significant increase in students' ability to read. According to NAEP, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, between 1992 and 2005 there was very little change in reading performance. In 2005, only 31% of America's eighth graders read at the proficient level or above.

These are serious challenges. They demand that we set high expectations and standards for literacy for all of our students. In many cases, this means that we need to ratchet up the bar. We need to improve our teaching. We need to improve our professional development if we're going to improve our expectations for our students.

Because in many schools across America today, business as usual will simply not equip our students for the business of tomorrow. Students without adequate reading skills have really serious consequences. According to the Alliance for Excellence in Education, every school day more than 3,000 high school students drop out of America's high schools, and the employment prospects for these dropouts is really, really staggering. Only four in ten, 16 to 19-year-old dropouts are employed, and the average earnings for these students hover around the poverty level.

Now many of these students are striving readers. They have inadequate decoding skills. Their vocabularies are limited, and their fluency and background knowledge is also limited. These serious shortcomings prevent them from keeping up in their high schools, and so many of them leave.

We can't continue to let our students fail. We've got to do a better job. We owe every child the opportunity to succeed. Now there are schools, high schools and middle schools across the country right now, that have already put in place consistent schoolwide cultures of literacy improvement. Many of these initiatives have been informed by the 2004 report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York titled, Reading Next.

In this report, adolescent literacy experts identified **15 key elements of effective adolescent literacy programs**. These include the use of direct, explicit comprehension instruction; effective instructional principles embedded in content; practices that motivate students to become independent, engaged learners; the use of text-based collaborative teaching; the use of strategic tutoring and intervention; the use of diverse texts matched to students' reading level; intensive writing coupled with this reading instruction; a strong integrated technology component that includes opportunities for striving readers to practice the new reading skills that they're learning and building; extended time for literacy—approximately two to four hours of literacy instruction and practice throughout the day; ongoing long-term professional development; ongoing formative classroom-based assessment; ongoing summative assessment of students and programs; teacher teams—interdisciplinary groups of teachers who meet together on an ongoing basis to talk about student progress—leadership from principals, coaches, and teachers who have a solid understanding of how to teach reading effectively; and a comprehensive, coordinated school literacy program.

Now, until recently, many people believed that students learn to read in kindergarten through 3rd grade. But, often reading difficulties crop up much later than this. By 4th grade the reading load increases, texts are longer, encounters with unknown words are more frequent.

Texts are different too. And they're not always as reader friendly as they used to be. There are more expository subjects, and there's more to be read in the expository domain, like history, science, and math. There are more unfamiliar genres. And the syntax for what students read is more complicated and more demanding.

And for English language learners, these challenges are exacerbated. These students have had less opportunity and fewer opportunities to practice learning to read, and they're confronted with the double challenge of learning a language and learning content in that language.

Today's middle and high schools absolutely must put in place aggressive literacy instruction for all students, coupled with interventions for these striving readers. And this literacy instruction and intervention cannot be isolated to one class. It has got to be integrated throughout the day in every single class.

Now, at Scholastic we are developing a series of online courses for teachers, coaches, and principals focusing on improving adolescent literacy. And recently, as part of this work, I've had the opportunity to visit a number of middle and high schools across the country. And these schools have been implementing these schoolwide literacy initiatives.

The schools I've visited have very diverse populations and students, and they're succeeding in raising reading achievement for almost all of their students. Now, while these schools are very different, they share a common framework for improvement. Each school is working to implement the 15 key elements of effective adolescent literacy programs identified in Reading Next.

But each school is going about this work in very, very different ways—ways that suit their students, their teachers, and their communities. Here are just a few of the things that these schools are doing. In one school teachers who teach the same subject across all four grade levels have the same lunch hour. They eat and meet every day to talk about what their students are learning.

At another school, all incoming students are tested in the fall, prior to their entry into school. Striving readers take an additional reading class that supplements their language arts class, and they also spend two periods a week in the computer lab working on reading labs that reinforce what they are learning in their reading classes.

In another district, a literacy coach is assigned to every single middle school. The literacy coaches are coordinated by the districtwide reading coordinator, who makes sure that they meet weekly to plan ongoing professional development for their teachers. These literacy coaches also work in the classrooms, beside the teachers, modeling effective practices, coaching, and listening to the teachers to identify their needs and how they can best support them to improve their reading instruction.

In several schools, in order to create very predictable and efficient ways for students to learn, teachers use a common lesson-plan framework across the entire building. No

matter what classroom a student goes into they know what's expected of them, and they know what to expect.

In each of these schools, all teachers across the content areas use a common set of teaching and reading strategies. They are reinforced in every single classroom and students are shown how to use those strategies to help them learn. Now this is not to say that we're asking content teachers to become reading teachers. This is definitely not the case.

When students learn to read and write like historians, scientists, or mathematicians, and other subject-area experts, and they read texts that are authentic to each of these subject areas, they increase their mastery of the discipline. At the same time, they become more accomplished and sophisticated readers.

These schools have created rigorous cultures of literacy. They've upped their expectations. They've upped their teaching and their professional development. They have ongoing professional development plans that are informed by their assessment and by their teacher observations. Teachers know their students. They create opportunities for their students to learn that are relevant, engaging, and motivating.

They are lead by principals and literacy teams that are focused on reading improvement. They select reading materials that are relevant to their content area and their topic. And these schools are exciting places that care about students, teachers, and literacy. Their achievements must become the norm in all of our schools if our students are going to succeed.

John ROSS

Thanks, Eunice, for helping us all to raise literacy expectations across grades and curricula. We'll introduce our last panelist now. I remind you to send your questions to us via e-mail from your webcast screen.

I'm happy to introduce you now to **Evan Lefsky, Director of Just Read, Florida!**— Governor Jeb Bush's statewide reading initiative. Prior to joining Just Read, Florida! Evan was a reading coach and specialist at Mount Dora High School, and he's also served as a high school reading and English teacher and a department chair. Evan earned his Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction with a concentration in reading from the University of Florida. He's taught preservice teachers and has coordinated professional development in the area of writing for the Central Florida Writing Project.

He's a favorite presenter at **the International Reading Association (IRA)**, National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the National Reading Conference. And today, he'll address the topics of statewide support for adolescent literacy, staff development, and how we measure our progress. Evan?

Evan LEFSKY, Just Read, Florida!

Thanks, John. I'd like to just preface my remarks with a little bit about the infrastructure in Florida. Just Read, Florida! was actually created in 2001 by Governor Jeb Bush and was supposed to be the actual, technical assistance and policy office for reading in the state of Florida. This is a unique feature for a content-area office in that we work very closely with the governor and the legislature, and it's really allowed us to make lots of inroads into adolescent literacy instruction for students and impact student achievement in Florida.

The cornerstone of our effort in Florida is what's called the **K-12 Comprehensive Reading Plan**—that is a requirement for all districts in the state of Florida. And it basically provides for a systemic vision of reading instruction across the state. The plan process was actually put into statute this year for the very first time. And it allows us to actually give money directly to districts.

This year the legislature appropriated approximately \$111 million, of which each district gets their share as a result of writing this K-12 Comprehensive Literacy Plan, which is then approved through our Just Read, Florida! office. The plan focuses on district professional development, leadership at both the district and school level, as well as instruction, and particularly on using assessments to drive instruction.

At the secondary level, we have **required reading intervention** for all students who are reading below grade level—not just students who are at our lowest quartile. We have partnered this reading intervention with **strong content-area reading support**, so that we have a powerful model for reading intervention. The idea being that in our state, what we saw, was that the content-area reading interventions we were providing were having an impact but were not powerful enough to close the gap for many of our students.

To help direct those interventions, we have actually created a **statewide progress monitoring system** that allows teachers and stakeholders to go in and actually look at live data that allows them to drive instruction for their students.

On the **professional development** front, we actually have **three major initiatives**. The first is our **reading endorsement**, which is our goal at increasing the number of highly qualified teachers who are able to teach reading interventions under No Child Left Behind. This reading endorsement actually consists of 15 graduate credit hours, or 300 in-service hours, and it's really targeted at helping those teachers deliver intervention. It's offered free to every teacher in the state of Florida, through professional development, both face-to-face and on-line, and all that is supported by the Just Read, Florida! office.

The second piece of professional development that we offer in the state is our **content-area reading professional development package**. And this package is really targeted at those content-area teachers who will deliver intervention in their content-area classroom.

This is really targeted for students that don't have decoding and fluency needs, but really have intervention needs in the areas of vocabulary and comprehension. Thus, this

professional development package targets instruction in those areas. So, we don't work with these teachers on instruction in fluency and decoding, but simply focus on vocabulary and comprehension.

The third piece of our professional development package in Florida is really our **reading and literacy coaches**. They are the people who really pull all this together. We have over 2,500 reading and literacy coaches across the state of Florida. They are full-time, site-based staff developers, who work not only with content-area teachers, but also with reading intervention teachers.

We have, for the last three years, actually provided districts reading and literacy coaches as part of a competitive grant. And then for the last two years, have provided direct money to districts as part of a state appropriation for reading.

This year we'll have, we have actually had, a group of coaches who have formed together to form a **Florida Literacy Coaches Association**. They are a fledgling organization that will advocate and support literacy coaches and their continuation in the state of Florida.

This year we also have a professional development opportunity for all of our principals, assistant principals, and coaches in the state of Florida that allows us to continue to support them. This is actually the fifth year we've done our **Just Read, Florida! Leadership Conference**. And this year we are expecting over 3,500 principal and coaches who will come as teams representing their schools for a three-day focus on literacy instruction and on student achievement.

This multifaceted, multifront effort is really the direction that we've headed in Florida. We know that we have long way to go when it comes to improving adolescent literacy instruction, but this piece that's been in place for the last few years, we've seen phenomenal gains at middle school this year, knowing that we can really have an impact on adolescent literacy.

John ROSS

Evan, thanks so much for giving us so many practical strategies to think about. Now, before we start our panel discussion, let's conduct our second opinion poll. To respond to this question, use the polling function on your webcast screen, just like you did for the first one.

Our second query is, "My state education agency is effectively supporting the efforts of our districts and schools to improve literacy levels for adolescents." Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or are you unsure. We'll report on these results before we close.

Well, we've received several questions from some of you watching the webcast, and I'm sure that this will be a lively next segment. Let's begin with a question for Evan,

following up on his presentation. Evan, this question says, “If content-area reading strategies don’t provide enough support for struggling readers, what else can we do?”

Evan LEFSKY

John, that’s really a systems question. What we recognized in Florida was that while we had very strong content-area interventions, the intensity of our interventions really needed to be ramped-up, in that we’ve become accustomed to measuring our success as students making a year’s worth of growth in one year.

And while that was fine for those students who came in on grade level, for students who were significantly behind, it really didn’t provide the intensity of support that many students needed. And that’s where we saw that we really needed to pair content-area interventions with specific reading interventions targeted to students’ needs. So that Johnny who comes in five years behind got a very different level of support than Jimmy who came in only a year or two behind. And we really tried to direct the intensity of the support based on the needs of students, based on reliable and valid assessment data.

So that’s the piece that we’ve really wanted to call an intervention—we won’t call an intervention a success until we know that we’ve actually accelerated growth for students.

John ROSS

So you’re really kind of differentiating the intervention...

Evan LEFSKY

Yes, the differentiated support is really what we’re all about—all the way from the student level, all the way back up to the district level through our K-12 plans, we really talk about the districts differentiating support to schools, and then within the school, the principal differentiating support to teachers, and then so on and so forth, all the way down to the students.

John ROSS

Great. Great.

Renee MURRAY

We found, John, in our work, that there are critical points—that moving from middle grades to high school and moving from high school to post-secondary, sometimes we have to do some intensive intervention with those students to help them catch up at that point because their reading skills are low, their writing skills are low, but they also don’t have those habits that help them be successful. They don’t know to study. They don’t know how to exist in the classroom.

And so that's what we've been doing with many of our schools in a Capstone Course at 8th grade, to try to catch up at that point, or catching kids when they come into 9th grade and saying, "before you ever go into 9th-grade English, we're going to work on your skills." And our schools have been very successful in making those interventions.

Dr. Eunice GREER

And the assessment is critical, but the communication is also critical. What we're learning, and what we're seeing when we talk to teachers, and principals, and coaches, is that coaches need to step up and really facilitate communication from the content-area teacher to the reading teacher, and back and forth, so that everyone knows how the student is doing and what the student needs throughout the day. That's a critical piece of following up on the improvement and making sure that it's nurtured along.

Evan LEFSKY

And with us, we'd have such a large implementation of coaches, we've really had to work to help them see that their role is really interpreting assessments for teachers – helping them to use the assessment versus delivering the assessment, which, in a lot of cases, that became their role, was the deliverer, or the person who would actually give the assessment.

John ROSS

Great. Wow. Thank you very much. We have a couple more questions, but please feel free to continue sending questions in through the webcast screen. This second one, I think Eunice, goes to you. And I must admit this is something that I might have said, being a teacher who is not a reading teacher. It says, "If I go into one of my schools and tell all the teachers that they are going to use a common set of reading strategies in their classrooms, and they're going to spend part of their time helping their students read their textbooks, the teachers are all going to look at me and say, 'I'm not a reading teacher. I have enough to do already.'" See, that sounds like me. "What do you suggest that I should tell them?"

Dr. Eunice GREER

I love this question. It's a great question, and it's a question that a lot of teachers ask. Learning is language based. I think I mentioned a few minutes ago we're not asking teachers to become reading teachers. We're trying to give them strategies that they can use to help their students learn.

Learning involves activating relevant topic knowledge. It involves knowing the vocabulary words that you are going to need and that you are going to encounter when you read. It also involves being able to read your text fluently and understand what you are reading.

So, that's all about learning. So, if we're giving teachers strategies to help their students learn, that's what we're supporting. Yes, kids have to be able to read. But reading facilitates learning, and that's the end point that we're going for.

John ROSS

Well, as a teacher who's not a reading teacher, I think I can understand that answer.

Renee MURRAY

My sell to you is what you want to be able to do is help your kids understand music, art, science, social studies, and to be able to communicate what it is that they are learning. Not that I want you to be in isolation to teach those skills, but to help students be effective scientists, they have to be able to understand what they read and communicate about what they've learned.

Evan LEFSKY

We come at it from even a little bit different perspective, you know--we've had a real struggle in finding lots of highly qualified reading intervention teachers. And so, in an effort to get our most highly qualified people with our neediest students, we know that some of our science and social studies teachers are very engaging teachers, and we really wanted to push that, so that we could get those teachers with our neediest students. And so we combine teachers who are very strong in their content and then also very strong in their reading knowledge base. And that provides a great reading intervention teacher.

Renee MURRAY

And that's what's behind the National Coaching Standards that have been published by the International Reading Association, National Council of Teachers of English, and the Content Area Associations. We've got to know the content as well as the strategy.

Dr. Eunice GREER

And it's interesting, these strategies don't happen the same way in every single classroom. We're trying to teach students to read like a scientist—to engage in the kinds of activities that a scientist engages in. And those interactions with texts are different from the way a historian might interact with texts.

So when science teachers work on summarizing, it's focusing on slightly different things than a historian would work on when they summarize a history text, or that a mathematician would work on. So, it's tailoring these strategies to the specific goals and textual demands in each of the subject areas—again, going toward learning.

John ROSS

That's really great. It seems to me that as all states are working to have highly qualified teachers, that helping every area, every content area, in terms of literacy within those content areas is actually making all of your content teachers more highly qualified.

PANELISTS

Absolutely.

John ROSS

Excellent. Excellent. Well, we have one here for Renee. "Renee, can you tell us what kind of support that states can put in place for teachers planning literacy instruction?"

Renee MURRAY

I think for many years our states have done a pretty effective job of telling teachers what the standards were, and also of providing workshops—whether they were summer workshops or some kind of thing. One of the pieces that we have found is so critical now is that ongoing support.

Evan, you've talked about the coaches and supporting the coaches in schools. Teachers need to know that there is a way to get an answer. There is a way to get support beyond just saying, "Okay, I went to a workshop. Now, I've come home. Now what do I do?" So, I think it's very critical that the states can provide that ongoing coaching. If we can't fund coaches in all schools, regional experts who can help us, who are in literacy electronic communication—whether it's webinars, or whether it's webcasts, or whatever it is we use in order to do that.

We also know that states can help provide teachers something they really want to know, and that's what quality teaching looks like. I'm not talking about scripted teaching, but samples of good teaching—whether it's videos, or whether it's opportunities to see demonstration teachers, or describe that.

And then, as we alluded to earlier, helping teachers understand data. It's not just, "My kid scored below proficiency on the state level." But, what does that really mean and how does that impact my classroom. Eunice earlier mentioned as well, it takes good leadership in a school, and one of the best things that states can do is help the leaders of schools understand what good literacy practices look like, so that they can help. It's not a matter of me sending my teachers; it's a matter of me being involved so that I know what my teachers should be able to do as well.

Dr. Eunice GREER

And it's also sending a consistent message from the state education agency, using the same terminology, so that if the assessment people from the agency are talking, they're using the same terms that the curriculum people are using, that the people in the funding

offices are using, so that the message comes again and again and again in the same terminology—and that people know what they are hearing. I think one of the things that really confuse teachers and administrators in schools is when the state talks about things in different ways, and using different terms. They're not sure what they want. And what they really want to know is, "Tell me what you want."

John ROSS

So a consistent message comes from the state.

PANELISTS

Absolutely.

John ROSS

Evan, can you tell us maybe, how in Florida you might be approaching that consistent message? How do you get that consistent message all the way down to the classroom?

Evan LEFSKY

One of the biggest ways that we've done that is through this reading endorsement. Most of our coaches, early on, have gone through this full reading endorsement. And then, what they do, is they've gone back now, and have become the people who deliver this reading endorsement to teachers in their own schools.

We've now moved also to regional coordinators through a project that's funded out of our office, called the Florida Literacy and Reading Excellence Center. And basically, what that group does, is they are site-based, in schools, working with coaches, delivering professional development side-by-side with a reading or literacy coach, working with them showing them how to improve upon their practice as a coach. Because with 2,500 coaches, we've got such a variation in the experience—a lot of variability—and so, they help to lessen that variability and increase the quality of our coaching, so they truly have an impact on teachers and student achievement.

John ROSS

Well, coaching seems to be something that has been a prevalent theme through our discussion today, and the interview with Melvina. And you bring up a really interesting point about—we were trying to talk about what a state can do—and one of those is working with leaders and teachers on using data. How can a coach facilitate that?

We were talking earlier that some of the coaches were required to administer assessments when the goal was actually to build capacity and facilitate assessments. So, do you have any kind of strategies? I know that when we polled states before the webcast there were many questions about coaching models and how to make a coaching model successful.

Renee MURRAY

I think one of the things is that the data does not belong to the coach, or to the guidance counselor, or to the principal. The data belongs to the teachers. And so instead of my work as a coach disaggregating the data, it's building that capacity that we as a teaching team do that together. Because if somebody just said, "This is what the data looks like," it's different from me discovering, myself, what it means to my classroom.

Dr. Eunice GREER

And it's helping teachers see where the data is in their classrooms, and helping them learn to use ongoing classroom-based assessment as their own checkpoints every day, every other day, as to whether their students are learning what they're trying to teach, or whether they need to go in and re-teach. And also helping them understand what the data says—that the data is not the end—"I gave the test. I've done my job." No. The data is to answer questions and to help you plan and move forward. And so, how can a coach structure conversations so that they become launching pads from the data into better instruction?

John ROSS

And I think that's a model, or a sentiment, across content areas, but certainly relevant in adolescent literacy. We have one last question. And this one I think all of you can address. It's not very specific to any one of you. It says, "one important aspect of raising reading achievement is to put into place a common high set of expectations." This person says, "We've got teachers with very different expectations. What advice can you give them about shifting expectations to a common high level?"

Dr. Eunice GREER

I'll start. That really sounds like a standards question: "How do I build an understanding in my building; a common set of standards?" And another word for standards, I think, is consensus. And so, you have to find a way to get everyone on the same page.

A great place to begin is where teachers are. So begin with the student work. Have teachers bring student work. If you're talking about writing, have teachers bring writing samples to a meeting and sit down and talk about, "this is what I'm doing in writing. These are the kinds of things. These are the expectations that I have for my students."

And initially these conversations are scary. People don't want to share. So you have to have these meetings frequently enough so that it becomes a comfortable conversation. "This is what I'm doing. This is what I'm doing well. This is where I need help." And then these become professional development opportunities. And it's the coach's responsibility to structure these conversations so that teachers can ask questions, get ideas, go back to their classrooms, try new things—bring the work back again.

What I like to tell teachers and administrators in schools that I'm working with is once you begin this process, no conversation should occur in the absence of student work. That should drive and focus the conversation. Because that's really where it's grounded. It's about improving student work.

Evan LEFSKY

I would agree, starting with the data. One of the things that we talk about when we work with our coaches in the state is this idea of coaching as a continuum. Every teacher is not ready for that coaching cycle of “we pre-conference. I go in and observe, and I give feedback.” Some are not ready for you to be in their classroom modeling. And so knowing where teachers are, it's really that collaborative effort.

Understand the culture of the teachers you're working with—that really makes a difference in knowing when a teacher's not ready, and maybe they just need me to give them a little bit of informal feedback or help them with a particular student they may be having difficulty with. So, it's knowing where to jump into this coaching process that is a key element of really bringing along all the teachers in your school versus trying to force a coaching model on every single teacher.

Renee MURRAY

Another bit of raising expectations, I think, falls with understanding what the next level requires. Until you have the conversation with the high school teachers, you're guessing as middle school teachers what they really need to go into high school, and with post-secondary. ACT does periodic conversations with post-secondary and with high school folks. And what their expectations are differs widely, often, in terms of what's expected.

We've been doing some work in that area as well. And you'll see that in some of the resources, I think, for the webcast later. But, it's so critical that we're having those vertical conversations—that we understand not just getting out of middle grades but getting ready for high school.

John ROSS

Well, thank you so much all of you. I've enjoyed talking to you today and learning more about adolescent literacy. We're approaching our final few minutes, and for all of you whose questions we did not get to, we can try to respond to those by e-mail.

Let's report the responses to our last poll now. The question was, “My state education agency is effectively supporting the efforts of our districts and schools to improve literacy levels for adolescents.” Again, we've had some resoundingly strong results. Forty-two percent strongly agree and 17% agree with that statement. Only 8% disagree and 33% were unsure. So I think we're doing pretty well, in terms of state agencies.

In closing, I speak for all of our presenters today and our webcast team from the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center at Edvantia. We want to thank you for participating with us today, and we encourage you to access the ARCC Web site following today's program, where you'll find several resources cited today and additional information to support your adolescent literacy programs.

I'd like you to answer the third polling question on topics that you would like us, the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center, to explore. There's a short evaluation survey that is also linked from the webcast page.

I'd like to especially thank Trenace Richardson and Kris Anstrom from the Center for Equity and Excellence in Education at George Washington University, for coordinating today's event. And special thanks to New Media Mill for producing today's webcast.

The challenge we share is not a small one. Eight million youngsters between 4th and 12th grade are struggling to read at grade level. According to the Reading Next report, they struggle because they cannot comprehend what they read. Academic failure is a national failure, and our literacy crisis is simply too serious and important to ignore.

Together we can take the next best steps, and states' roles will be more important than ever. We hope your conversations will be compelling and your strategies successful. Thank you again for joining us today. We look forward to hearing and reading about your next successes. I'm John Ross.

The Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center (ARCC) at Edvantia is one of 16 technical assistance centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The comprehensive center provides the state education agencies in North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia with intensive technical assistance to address the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements and meet student achievement goals. The ARCC at Edvantia is a dynamic, collaborative network consisting of the Center for Equity and Excellence in Education at George Washington University, the Eastern Stream Center on Resources and Training (ESCORT), the National Center for Family Literacy, the SERVE Center for Continuous Improvement at the University of North Carolina—Greensboro, and the Southern Regional Education Board.

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