



Strategies to Promote Third Grade Reading Performance in Virginia

Study Mandate

SJR 31 (2010) directed JLARC to study ways to promote and ensure early reading proficiency and comprehension among third graders in public schools

- Rank divisions based on most recent third grade reading pass rates
- Identify best practices documented in the research and/or used by Virginia school divisions
- Determine strategies to increase early reading proficiency

Study Methods and Time Frame

- Key study methods
 - Analysis of student level SOL and other data
 - Survey of Virginia school divisions
 - Visits to 13 divisions & observations of 44 third grade classrooms
 - Interviews with experts & literature review
- Study briefed to JLARC in September 2011

In Brief

Student pass rates on the third grade reading SOL test have increased statewide over the past decade.

Some school divisions outperform expectations, but others continue to underperform.

Key strategies, particularly related to training and support for classroom teachers, can help improve reading instruction and student performance.

In This Presentation

Background

SOLs Assess Reading Performance

Reading Performance in Virginia

Strategies for the Classroom Reading Program

Teachers Must Be Well-Trained and Supported

Options

Early Reading Achievement Relates to Future Academic Success

- Learning to read has a “build-upon” nature
- Reading is increasingly important after third grade
- Research shows
 - Strong readers in early grades have an advantage
 - Students who struggle early have difficulty succeeding
 - Best strategy for helping struggling readers is early identification and supplemental instruction

Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI)

- Established in VA in 1997, expanded in 2000
- Provides additional instruction to K-3 students identified as having difficulties with reading
 - PALS* used as screening instrument
- 100% participation by VA school divisions in FY 2012

* Phonological Awareness Literacy Screenings. Developed by UVA.

EIRI Funds Additional Instruction for Students With Reading Difficulties

- \$13.4 million in State funds annually (2010-2012 biennium)
 - Local match based on local ability to pay
- Funding covers 100% of eligible K-2 students and 25% of eligible third graders
- Divisions have flexibility in how to provide intervention

In This Presentation

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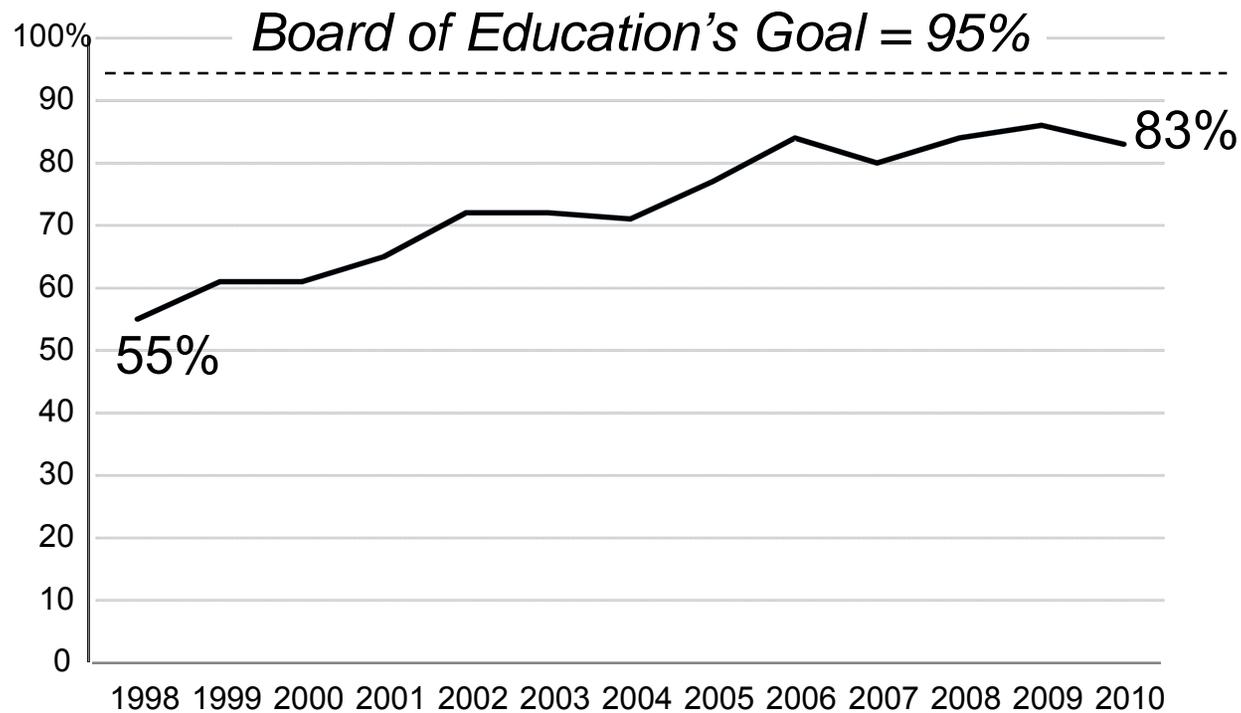
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Third Grade Reading SOL Pass Rates Have Increased Since 1998



Source: DOE data

4 SOL Tests Are Administered in Third Grade

- Third grade is first year of SOL tests
- SOL tests for reading, math, science, and history are administered
- Reduce to **reading** and **math**
 - Allows greater focus on reading
 - Aligns with testing in most other states

Recommendation

To help schools bring greater focus to reading skill development in third grade, the Board of Education should limit the SOL tests taken by third grade students to reading and math.

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Strategies for Struggling Readers

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Variations in Third Grade Reading Performance

- Three factors most explain the variation in third grade reading performance in Virginia:
 - economic status
 - disability status
 - race
- Other factors have an impact but less so

School Divisions' Impact Reading Performance

- Because socioeconomic factors affect student reading performance, SOL tests alone do not directly indicate the “value added” by divisions or schools.
- Some divisions appear to be succeeding in raising student performance although they have challenging factors.

Top Divisions Based on Pass Rates Compared to Exceeding Expectations

Top Divisions (Based on Pass Rate)	Pass Rate	Top Divisions (Based on Exceeding Expectations)	Pass Rate	% Points Above Expectations
1 Patrick Co.	95.4%	1 Martinsville	89.9%	17.3%
2 Scott Co.	92.9	2 Patrick Co.	95.4	13.5
3 Highland Co.	92.9	3 Buckingham Co.	90.7	11.2
4 Falls Church	91.6	4 Danville	82.8	10.0
5 Hanover Co.	91.4	5 Charlotte Co.	89.3	9.0

Source: 2010 third grade reading SOL test data

In This Presentation

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Key Practices for Classroom Reading Program

- Covers important components, such as phonics and fluency
- Daily reading block is 90-120 minutes and includes writing
- Includes whole-group and small-group, differentiated instruction
- Instruction is informed by data

Key Practices for Classroom Reading Program (continued)

- Includes high-quality, engaging reading material at different levels
- Use of technology
- Preschool ensures students have pre-literacy knowledge
- Clearly articulated, division-wide plan

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Teacher is the Critical Classroom Factor

- While non-school factors have a strong impact upon student achievement, the teacher is the critical factor in determining the effectiveness of the classroom reading program.
- Exemplary teachers were observed in Virginia's third grade classrooms, but there is room for improvement.

Differences in Teacher Quality Among Divisions

- Higher performing divisions
 - Effective, well-trained teachers observed more frequently and part of the teaching culture
- Lower performing divisions
 - Characterized as having “pockets of expertise,” with expert teaching not as widespread

Ongoing Professional Development Promotes Effective Teachers

- Key areas of professional development
 - Foundations of teaching reading and comprehension
 - Differentiated instruction
 - Classroom management
- Only 64% of lowest performing divisions provided professional development related to reading (compared to 80% of all divisions)
 - Fewer lower performing divisions made frequent use of recommended strategies

Support for Classroom Teachers is Critical

- Literacy coaches
- Reading specialists
- Additional staff to assist in classrooms

Literacy Coaches Can Improve Teacher Effectiveness

- Provide on-site professional development and in-class coaching
 - In contrast to less effective, “one-shot” professional development
- How available are literacy coaches?
 - Only one-third of divisions have staff solely devoted as literacy coaches
 - Greater availability in higher performing divisions

Key Factors Increase Effectiveness of Literacy Coaches

- Clear definition
- Time spent directly with teachers
- Training
 - Should cover not only how to teach reading, but also how to train and support teachers, for example, modeling of lessons

Recommendation

The General Assembly may wish to direct DOE to

- (1) establish a definition for literacy coaches, including guidelines on time allocation, and
- (2) consider amending higher education endorsement regulations to ensure that literacy coaches have adequate training.

Reading Specialists Work With Struggling Students

- Assess and diagnose reading difficulties
- Provide supplemental reading instruction
 - Inside and outside the classroom

Reading Specialists Are Widely Used in Virginia Schools

- Supported by the *Code of Virginia*

... each local school board shall employ the following reading specialists in elementary schools, one full-time in each elementary school at the discretion of the local school board

- 92% of divisions have reading specialists
 - Most elementary schools (84%) have at least one

Additional Staff and Reduced Class Size Support Reading Program

- Helps keep children on-task
- Allows multiple small-groups to meet simultaneously during differentiated, small-group time
- Children receive more individualized attention

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Maintain Early Elementary Teachers Well-Trained in Reading Instruction

Option	Responsibility	Additional Annual Cost to State
Maintain or improve opportunities for professional development *	Local	0
Provide more support and guidance on best practices for teaching reading through PALS office*	State	\$380,000 - \$600,000

* *Report recommendation.*

Provide Support for Early Elementary Classroom Teachers

Option	Responsibility	Additional Annual Cost to State
Fund literacy coaches*	State/Local	\$5.0 million - \$34.5 million
Fund reading specialists	State/Local	\$36.3 million
Maintain/increase funding for paraprofessionals	Local	0
Maintain or reduce class sizes in early elementary grades	State/Local	0

* *Report recommendation. Top suggestion of school divisions.*

Support Well-Run, Effective Intervention Programs

Option	Responsibility	Additional Annual Cost to State
Support quality Response to Intervention (RtI) programs	State/Local	0
Fully fund EIRI through third grade	State/Local	\$3.1 million

Maintain an Academic Environment Supportive of Early Literacy

Option	Responsibility	Additional Annual Cost to State
Maintain and/or expand preschool opportunities*	State/Local	0
Explore and implement best practices in report	Local	0

** Report recommendation. Cost to State would increase if eligibility expanded or per-pupil amounts increased.*

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For More Information

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Virginia Students Outperform Most Other States on National Reading Test*

- In 4th grade, only MA's average score significantly higher
- In 8th grade, average scores in 10 states significantly higher
- VA's scores significantly higher than all southern states except FL, which is not significantly different

* NAEP reading test administered in 2009

