



## **Research Brief**

### **Title: Adolescent Literacy**

**Question: How can literacy be developed at the secondary level?**

#### **Summary of Findings:**

Learning to read is usually taught through the third grade, then the switch begins to reading to learn through sixth grade. It is often assumed that by the time students enter secondary schools, they have the requisite reading and literacy skills to navigate and comprehend increasingly complex and challenging texts.

The expectations the world of work has for their employees includes high levels of literacy to interpret journals, technical information and other professional readings, analyze charts and graphs, determine the creditability of sources, evaluate arguments, and demonstrate reading, writing, and speaking abilities. Yet, in 2005, ACT reported that 50% of students lacked the reading skills to be successful in college. Several reports stated that two-thirds of students in grades 8 and 12 read below a proficient level and one quarter of students in these grades are not able to read at a basic level. Even more sobering is that almost half of African American and Latino 8<sup>th</sup> grade students read below a basic level and half of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students from urban and high poverty areas read at or below the third grade level. A strong correlation has been found that indicates the reading ability of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students is a high indicator of success in high school. College graduates earn up to 70% more money than high school graduates, and dropouts are four times more likely to be unemployed. According to recent statistics, 3,000 students drop out of high school every day, many of who lack the essential literacy skills.

Reading is defined as a complex, purposeful, social, and cognitive process in which readers simultaneously use their knowledge of spoken and written language, their knowledge of the topic of the text, and their knowledge of their culture to construct meaning. Reading is not a technical skill acquired once and for all in the primary grades, but rather a developmental process. A reader's competence continues to grow through engagement with various types of texts and wide reading for various purposes over a lifetime. ( Coutant & Perchemlides, p. 42)

According to No Child Left Behind, by 2014, 100% of the students must be proficient in reading, however, most secondary schools do not offer reading courses, and if they do, they tend to be for remediation purposes. Secondary teachers often feel the pressure to cover more material than there is time and most have not been trained to teach reading. Real reading is not just about strategies but a "... fusion of self-efficacy, interest, and strategic



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knowledge” ( Ivey & Fisher, p.9). The literature clearly stated that every teacher should be a reading teacher because they are the experts in their content.

There is no one way or magic program that will answer all of the students’ issues. However, there is agreement on the skills that a successfully literate person should possess. Literate people are:

- code breakers who have the vocabulary skills to understand the material, know how to find out what unknown words mean and use those tactics; and have the strategies to determine literal meanings.
- meaning makers who interact with the text, build on prior knowledge, and relate it to personal and background knowledge; and retain and use important information in depth.
- text users who know how to use texts to gain necessary information.
- text analysts who can identify purpose and the author’s message and accept and question the material.

What educators can do:

- provide on-going professional development and support for all teachers on reading and literacy skills and their meaningful integration into the specific content areas.
- hire a literacy coach if possible, who is well-versed in reading skills and the different content areas.
- provide time in the day for students to read. According to Ash, 15-24 year olds in the United States “spend an average of just 8 \_ minutes each day reading books, magazines, and newspapers for pleasure,” (p. 36) and that girls are three times and boys are six times as likely to interact with computer text instead of print material.
- deliberately teach literacy skills that are germane to the assigned reading(s).
- provide intensive writing experiences and timely feedback.
- research different literacy strategies and purposefully include and teach them in the curriculum.
- review available data to determine the state of literacy at your school, then establish literacy goals.
- provide literacy and reading skills to all students in the school.



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### Online Resources:

- Adolescent literacy and content area reading  
“This Digest provides a brief summary of the development of content area reading; it discusses a reconceptualization of adolescent literacy and content learning; and it offers as example of a new model for both secondary classroom practice and teacher education.”  
<http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-3/area.htm>
- Adolescent literacy. A position statement.  
This is thorough research and an in-depth position statement on adolescent literacy. This includes full descriptions of the literacy needs of adolescents.  
[http://www.reading.org/downloads/positions/ps1036\\_adolescent.pdf](http://www.reading.org/downloads/positions/ps1036_adolescent.pdf)
- At a glance: Adolescent literacy collaboratory  
A description of a year long collaborative for teacher teams in English, math, science, and integrated studies to develop literacy strategies.  
[http://www.alliance.brown.edu/programs/lab/collab\\_info.shtml](http://www.alliance.brown.edu/programs/lab/collab_info.shtml)
- Fostering high levels of reading and learning in secondary students  
Reasons for teaching less breadth and more depth and how to incorporate reading strategies are provided.  
<http://readingonline.org/articles/graves1/mainnoframe.html>
- Four key components of the adolescent literacy support framework  
A pyramid that lists the 4 components of literacy for adolescents.  
<http://www.knowledgeloom.org/media/bpinter/1174/pyramid.html>
- Instructional strategies resources  
This is a resource list of different aspects of reading with live links to additional resources within the specified topics.  
[http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/centers/clc/instructional\\_strategies\\_resources.html](http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/centers/clc/instructional_strategies_resources.html)
- Literacy issues in secondary education  
An annotated reference list that deals specifically with the issue of literacy at the secondary level.  
<http://www.tcdsb.org/library/Professional%20Library/AnBiblioProf.html>



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- Literacy websites for students in grades 9-12  
A set of literacy resources with active online links for English classes.  
<http://www.literacy.uconn.edu/912sites.htm>
- NCTE consultants specializing in adolescent literacy  
A list of specialists in adolescent literacy with active links is provided.  
<http://www.ncte.org/collections/adolescentliteracy/resources/121209.htm>
- Reading at risk. The state response to the crisis in adolescent literacy  
A summary of the reasons literacy development at the secondary level must be addressed, along with recommendations that each state should implement to support literacy development.  
[http://www.nasbe.org/recent\\_pubs/adol%20literacy%20exec%20summary.pdf](http://www.nasbe.org/recent_pubs/adol%20literacy%20exec%20summary.pdf)
- Reading happens in your mind, not in your mouth  
This is a description of an Academic Literacy course for all freshmen at an urban high school.  
<http://www.wested.org/stratlit/prodevel/happens.shtml>
- Reading to achieve. A governor's guide to adolescent literacy  
This is an extensive report on why literacy development in adolescents is critical, problems faced in doing this, recommendations to states, examples of promising practices, and possible funding sources.  
<http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0510GOVGUIDELITERACY.PDF>
- Reading researchers outline elements needed to achieve adolescent literacy  
15 essentials for developing literate secondary students are listed.  
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/10/20/08literacy.h24.html?print=1>
- Standards for middle school and high school literacy coaches  
This provides standards for secondary literacy coaches with standards in math, science, and social studies, and describes some high schools that have literacy coaches.  
[http://www.ira.org/downloads/resources/597coaching\\_standards.pdf](http://www.ira.org/downloads/resources/597coaching_standards.pdf)
- Students in grades 9-12 applying literacy online  
A set of resources with active links for students that will help them develop literacy skills.  
<http://www.literacy.uconn.edu/912apply.htm>



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- Teens unlikely to meet reading goal, RAND report warns  
This article states a concern that unless secondary schools begin purposefully helping students develop literacy skills, the NCLB deadline of 2014 will not be met.  
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/05/16rand.h24.html?print=1>

### Periodicals:

- Ash, G. E. (2005, October). What did Abigail mean? Educational Leadership 63, 2. 36-41.  
A description of the characteristics of good readers, skills good readers have and the Reciprocal Reading Plus strategy are provided in this article.
- Coutant, C. & Perchemlides, N. (2005, October). Strategies for teen readers. Educational Leadership 63, 2. 42-47.  
Strategies for working with students to develop their reading literacy with expository and narrative texts are succinctly described.
- Gardiner, S. (2005, October). A skill for life. Educational Leadership 63, 2. 67-70.  
This article was written by an English and journalism teacher at Billings Senior High School in Billings, MT. It describes and supports reasons for employing the Silent Sustained Reading program he has been using in his classes for over 25 years.
- Hobbs, R. (2005, October). What's news? Educational Leadership 63, 2, 58-61.  
A description of a program that uses the media to support and strengthen students' reading comprehension, literary analysis and writing skills at Concord High School, New Hampshire is described.
- Ivey, G. & Fisher, D. (2005, October). Learning from what doesn't work. Educational Leadership 63, 2. 8-14.  
5 reading techniques are cited and described that are commonly used in secondary education classrooms that do not work.
- Tirozzi, G. N. (2005, December). Secondary school reform: Reading, reading, reading! Newsleader, 53, 4. 2.  
Reasons for the importance of teaching reading and addressing the literacy skills of middle and high school students are described in this brief piece. It also refers to a new publication on literacy that NASSP sent out to every secondary administrator in the United States.



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## **Research Brief**

Submitted Date: 12/12/05

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