

THE GROWING READERS INITIATIVE

Central Falls Public Schools and The Learning Community
Partner to Support Dramatic Improvement in Reading

Based on a shared commitment to proving that poverty is not a barrier to student achievement, The Learning Community and the Central Falls School District have formed a long-term partnership to improve reading performance district-wide. The first phase of this innovative work, The Growing Readers Initiative, began in August 2008 and showed strong results within six months.

What does the Growing Readers Initiative do?

The Growing Readers Initiative invests in Central Fall's dedicated teachers and specialists -- giving them the tools and support to increase their effectiveness in teaching reading. In the project's pilot site 86% of students were reading at or above the national benchmark within the first 6 months. The Growing Readers Initiative supports:

- *Excellent Teaching*: models and supports excellent teaching
- *Dramatic Gains in Achievement*: advancing every elementary school to make gains in reading
- *Quarterly Assessments*: a more frequent system of quarterly assessments is based on national standards and tells teachers what their students need right away.
- *Using Data*: supports classroom teachers and specialists in using data to inform instruction
- *Targeted Investments*: maximizes resources by providing highly targeted professional development
- *Scaling Innovation*: enables innovation in one public school to be shared rapidly district-wide

How Many People are Being Reached?

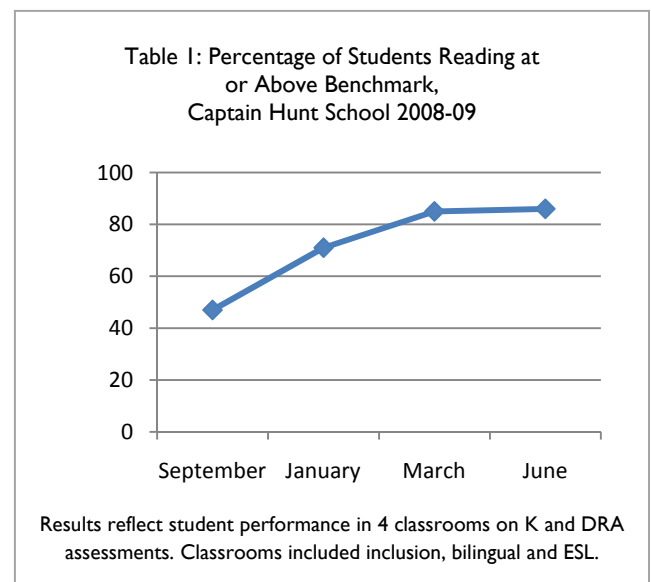
In August of 2008 the Growing Readers Initiative began by working with teachers in a pilot site. Beginning in August 2009 the initiative was expanded district wide in grades K-2 to include:

- 4 schools: Captain Hunt, Robertson, Veterans, Ella Risk and their principals
- 41 teachers and 3 teaching assistants in grades K-2
- 4 reading specialists + 1 literacy assistant
- Through this work we are reaching 800 students in grades K-2 with targeted, data-driven instruction

What are the Results?

We have seen dramatic results in less than one year (Table 1). In our pilot school 86% of participating students were reading at or above the national benchmark in reading after six months: *a 39% gain* since the initial September assessments. Each classroom made improvement ranging from 20-60 percentage points.

Teachers are using assessment data to inform and refine their practice in ways that were not possible 6 months ago; for instance, teachers are reassigning reading groups quarterly based on an analysis of assessment data. Based on the success of the pilot, the initiative was expanded district-wide. New data describing student performance will be available in November, January, March and June.



How is this Partnership Unique?

- Best example of deep partnership between a traditional school district and a charter school in Rhode Island.
- Offers embedded professional development and opportunities for professional growth on a broad scale.
- All materials and trainings are grade-specific and tailored to the needs an urban population.
- It is a teacher-to-teacher initiative – sharing practical tools that work in real urban classrooms.
- Maximizing our public investment: the per pupil investment in one school is now spurring innovation with 3 times as many students
- Rapid results within months, not years.

How does the Growing Readers Initiative do it?

1. **Targeted Professional Development:** Instructional coaches from The Learning Community observe Central Falls teachers while they teach and then debrief on their observations. Coaches also teach lessons while teachers observe and then debrief afterwards. This “embedded” coaching takes place in each teacher’s own classroom with their students and provides practical suggestions that teachers can use immediately. Coaching happens in intensive one week blocks at four times throughout the year.
2. **Supporting Excellent Instruction:** All classrooms are using a modified form of Reading Workshop (a technique popularized by Lucy Calkins of Columbia’s Teachers College) as the instructional structure for reading. Central Falls teachers are given 4 units of study and the daily teaching points for those units. Coaches provide several lessons plans that have been tested at The Learning Community and then support teachers in learning to craft clear lesson plans using the Reading Workshop approach. Instead of being handed a prescribed curriculum, teachers are building their toolbox of strategies.
3. **Using Data to Inform Instruction:** Teachers and reading specialists are transitioning to a system that assesses students against national benchmarks quarterly, not once or twice a year. They receive critical data immediately about a student’s reading comprehension, fluency and accuracy. We have created quarterly benchmarks at each grade level so that teachers can know if their students are on track to meet the national standard in reading by the end of the year. Teachers learn how to analyze assessment data and use it to decide what each student needs to continue growing as a reader. This analysis informs the small, targeted Guided Reading Groups that teachers convene in their classrooms as a part of regular instruction and also informs which students might need support from a reading specialist.
4. **Rapid Response for Students Needing More Support:** We have created a Reading Safety Net system at each school that offers support from the reading specialist to students who have fallen below the reading benchmark. Safety net groups are dynamic – a student may be in the group for a month, a semester or throughout the year. This support is in addition to regular classroom instruction, which means these students receive nearly twice as much small group reading instruction. All reading specialists are learning to run reading safety net groups, to manage quarterly assessment periods, and to analyze school-wide data. In addition, they are also attending Reading Workshop trainings to facilitate collaboration between reading specialists and classroom teachers.