



State of Connecticut  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



Commission on Children

## Reading at All Costs: Building on Three Years of Reading Reform

April 2016

In the last few years, the legislature's Black and Puerto Rican Caucus, in partnership with the state Department of Education, Commission on Children, University of Connecticut, Literacy How, and Grossman Foundation, have sought to pilot, learn from, and grow an intentional set of literacy reforms to significantly narrow the achievement gap in reading.

Policies have been developed to facilitate this intensive response to what is an education crisis in Connecticut.

### **Year 1: Public Act 11-85**

Initial reforms piloted the use of alternative instruments to assess children's reading levels and building capacity in all teachers in the science of teaching reading.

- Allowed for alternative reading assessment instruments to be tested, designed to be teacher-friendly, efficient, and in-depth regarding necessary reading interventions;
- Tested how to include parents as they are core customers and partners in their children's learning;
- Assessed the impact of external coaches on classroom outcomes in reading; and
- Allowed on-going training in scientifically-based reading research and practice for teacher and school administrators.

### **Year 2: PA 12-116**

Focused a new pilot on the 50% of African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students who were not reading at proficiency. This included individualized reading interventions to help these students move forward successfully.

- Targeted intervention assessed all students in selected schools and rapidly intervened with students whose reading was below proficiency, utilizing: a) an external literacy coach, b) four reading interventionists per schools, c) rigorous and on-going assessments, d) prompt and proven, research-based interventions, e) summer school with focus on reading excellence, and f) a focus on partnering with parents on reading.
- Budget allowed the pilot in five sites with expansion of 5 schools per year.
- Began to incorporate statewide reform by:

- Increased expectations in pre-service of our special education and reading specialists who will have to pass a test in the science of teaching reading before they can work in CT schools;
- Development of new reading assessment tools, a professional development system in reading, incentives for schools that improve reading performance, higher education improvements in oral language and early literacy for pre service teachers; and
- Explicit transition reporting between early childhood and kindergarten teachers to assist young children in their early language skills.

### **Year 3: PA 13-245**

Focused on professional development to improve teacher knowledge of teaching reading and increase pedagogical and practical exposure, expanding the interventions that were successful over the last two years.

- Administered a K-3 reading survey of our current teachers to help us to understand what they know and do not know about teaching reading, and help create a professional development plan with targeted support and information tailored to the, school, grade or individual teacher.
- Required that Alliance Districts which choose to close the achievement gap through improvements in reading instruction do so by using the model emerging from the last two pilot years.

### **Year 4 and beyond: Leadership and Resources to Embed and Expand**

Building on the results and learning from the ongoing, now-consolidated reading pilots, the state is leading a coordinated state-wide literacy effort by:

- Building internal capacity in tier 1 and tier 2 in each of the schools by embedding a systemic assessment process and implementing reading interventions with fidelity;
- Building internal leadership at SDE through the hiring of a Reading Director, who reports directly to the highest levels at SDE and collaborates with the legislature and other partners instrumental in developing the state's reading model;
- Developing and implementing a professional development model for teacher leaders, principals, district reading coordinators and superintendents to create and sustain reading improvement in their schools and districts. The delivery format will target Alliance districts and include statewide monthly training courses as well as embedded support at the district and school level;
- Consolidating appropriate resources to bring the multi-tier reading intervention model to scale in the Alliance Districts and across the state through a reading plan; and
- Utilizing modern literacy assessment instruments that closely monitor a student's reading level and guide individualized interventions.