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THE VALUE OF ENHANCED READING OPPORTUNITIES IN HIGH SCHOOLS: Report Finds Supplemental Reading Programs Can Improve High School Students' Test Scores

Supplemental reading programs have a statistically significant impact on improving student test scores in reading comprehension, according to early findings from the Enhanced Reading Opportunities (ERO) study. *The Enhanced Reading Opportunities Study: Early Impact and Implementation Findings* evaluates the effects of supplemental reading programs that are being implemented as part of small learning communities in thirty-four high schools from ten school districts across the country. MDRC, a nonprofit education and social policy research organization, conducted the study in partnership with the American Institutes for Research and Survey Research Management under oversight by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences.

"The fact that these programs did produce an effect suggests some promise," **James J. Kemple, the director of K–12 education policy for MDRC**, told *Education Week*. "But the fact that three quarters of students would still be eligible for the programs at the end of the year also suggests there's a long way to go."

The two programs in the study, Reading Apprenticeship Academic Literacy, which was designed by WestEd, and Xtreme Reading, created by the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, were selected from a pool of seventeen applicants by a national panel of adolescent literacy experts. Both programs are yearlong courses that replace a ninth-grade elective class and are offered in addition to students' regular English language arts classes. They are targeted to students who read two to five years below grade level when they enter high school. According to the study, both programs "strive to help ninth-grade students adopt the strategies and routines used by proficient readers, improve their comprehension skills, and be motivated to read more and to enjoy reading." The ultimate goal of both programs is to improve students' academic performance during high school and to keep them on course toward graduation.

During the first year of the study, the participating high schools identified an average of 85 ninth-grade students who read between the fourth- and seventh-grade levels. Approximately 55 percent of these students were randomly enrolled in the ERO class while the remaining students took a regularly scheduled elective class.

At the beginning of the school year, the average student in the study sample read at a grade-level equivalent of 5.1. At the end of the year, students assigned to one of the supplemental reading courses were reading at a grade-level equivalent of 6.1, compared to 5.9 for students in the control group. However, even with that improvement in reading comprehension, 76 percent of

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the students in the supplemental reading program were still reading at two or more years below grade level at the end of their ninth grade year.

As the report notes, there were some problems with implementing the programs in some school districts that could have affected the results. For example, the average start date for ERO classes was six weeks into the school year. In the fifteen schools where the ERO programs began no later than six weeks after the start of school and implementation was moderately or well aligned with the program model, impacts on reading comprehension were larger than in the nineteen schools where at least one of these conditions was not met.

This report is the first of three from the study. The next report, which is scheduled to be released in late 2008, will offer findings for a second year of program implementation and a second group of ninth-grade students. The final report, due in 2009, will examine the impact of the supplemental reading programs for both groups of ninth graders on their performance in core academic classes, their grade-to-grade promotion rates, and their performance on high-stakes state assessments.

The complete report is available at <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/471/full.pdf>.



CLOSING THE EXPECTATIONS GAP: Achieve Grades States on High School Reform Efforts

Since 2005, Achieve has surveyed all fifty states and the District of Columbia about their status in aligning high school standards, graduation requirements, assessments, and accountability systems to the expectations of college and the workforce. According to Achieve's latest report, *Closing the Expectations Gap 2008*, a majority of states have committed to raise expectations for high school students and more than one third have already adopted college- and career-ready standards and graduation requirements. However, only nine states expect to have college- and career-ready testing systems in place by the end of 2008, and only four will hold high schools accountable for their students' readiness.

“The pace and the progress of high school reform efforts are encouraging,” said **Matthew Gandal, executive vice president of Achieve**, “but no state has done everything that is necessary to close the gap between what is required of students in high school and what will be expected of them after they graduate. Higher standards must be accompanied by better assessments and next generation accountability systems if we are to realize the goal of all students graduating college and career ready.”

Indeed, the report notes that no state will have all five policies (standards, graduation rates, assessments, P–20 data systems, and accountability) in place in 2008 and only three (Louisiana, New York, and Texas) have four of the five policies in place. Additionally, nineteen states currently do not have any of the policies in place, and another fourteen states will only have one of the five policies in place in 2008—together, these states represent two thirds of the fifty states. However, Achieve did discover that many states anticipate having these policies in place in 2009 or are in the process or are planning to do so in the future. According to the report, nineteen states will have their high school standards aligned to postsecondary expectations in 2008, with

an additional twenty-six states saying that they are currently in the process or plan to do so. And when asked about their graduation requirements, eighteen states and the District of Columbia said that they currently require all students to complete a college- and career-ready curriculum to earn their diploma, and twelve other states plan to adopt similar requirements in the future.

When it comes to implementing policies related to assessments, P–20 data systems, and accountability, states have made less progress. According to the report, only nine states administer college-readiness tests to all high school students as part of their statewide assessment systems, and only eight say that they have P–20 longitudinal data systems that match K–12 data with postsecondary data to track the progress of individual students from kindergarten through college. However, an additional twenty-three states report plans to administer college-readiness exams in the future while an additional thirty-nine are currently developing P–20 data systems.

States also struggle when it comes to evaluating high schools and holding them accountable for student improvement. In its survey, Achieve identified only four states (Louisiana, New York, North Carolina, and Texas) that currently factor both a cohort graduation rate and the earning of a college- and career-ready diploma into their systems for evaluating high schools. Additionally, only six states (Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Virginia) and the District of Columbia are in process or planning to implement such a system in the near future.

“States will need to pay more attention to these policy levers if the promise of these reforms is to be realized,” the report reads. “Newly adopted standards will be of marginal value without aligned assessments to measure student performance. Similarly, raising graduation requirements for students without holding schools accountable for ensuring that students meet the new standards is both unfair and ineffective.”

The complete report is available at <http://achieve.org/files/50-state-2008-prepub.pdf>.



AP REPORT TO THE NATION: Advanced Placement Participation Increases While Mean Scores Decrease

Though a greater proportion of public high school students are taking Advanced Placement (AP) exams and earning passing grades on these exams than ever before, the mean score has declined for the fourth year in a row. Additionally, large gaps in AP participation remain between white students and students of color. These findings were reported in *The Fourth Annual AP Report to the Nation*, published by College Board, the nonprofit organization that works with colleges and universities to develop AP courses and exams.

Nationally, about 25 percent of the Class of 2007—more than 2.8 million students—took at least one AP exam in high school, compared to almost 23 percent of the Class of 2006. Slightly over 15 percent of the Class of 2007 scored a three or higher on at least one AP exam, while only 14.7 percent of the Class of 2006 and 11.7 percent of the Class of 2002 did so. A score of three (out of five) is unofficially considered a “passing” score by many postsecondary institutions, which tend to offer college credit to students for the subjects in which they achieve these scores.

According to the report, New York, Maryland, Virginia, Florida, and Massachusetts graduated the greatest percentages of seniors with scores of three or higher on their AP exams. The report also highlights many of the New England states as “models of improvement,” with Vermont

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showing the greatest one- and five-year gains in the percentage of its students scoring a three or higher. College Board attributes the New England states' successes, in particular, to collaborations between educators and policymakers designed to "foster access to AP courses among students in rural and urban areas, increase participation of low-income students in courses preceding AP, [and] provide teachers with opportunities for professional development," among other objectives.

However, researchers at *Education Week*, who analyzed the results, find that, though more students scored at three or higher than ever before, mean exam scores had dipped for the fourth straight year, dropping from 2.9 to 2.83. The decrease was seen across most racial and ethnic groups, including African American students, whose mean score fell by 0.12 to 1.91, Mexican American students, whose mean score of 2.39 showed a 0.12-point decrease, and white students, whose mean score fell 0.04 points to 2.95. Only the Asian Pacific Islander American score did not decrease; at 3.05, it was 0.01 higher than the 2004 score, where it had held steady for the two subsequent years.

Part of the reason for the decline could be because traditionally underrepresented students, who are enjoying greater access to the exams, do not get the same preparation as their more well-to-do counterparts. As the report reads, "AP [e]xam results indicate that often these students are not receiving adequate preparation for the rigors of college-level course work."

In relation to this issue, *The Fourth Annual AP Report to the Nation* highlights what College Board calls the "equity and excellence gap," which it says is present whenever the percentage of traditionally underserved students—such as African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian students—who have access to and succeed on AP exams is lower than the percentage of underserved students in the entire class.

For example, in Florida, almost 22 percent of the student body is Hispanic, but 27.6 percent of Hispanic students in Florida scored a three or higher on their AP exams, making Florida one of the states that had successfully closed the equity and excellence gap for its Hispanic students. On the other hand, an equity and excellence gap continues to exist among Florida's African American students, who make up 19.6 percent of the student body. Among those students, only 6 percent scored a three or higher on their AP exams. By College Board's measure, several states have eliminated the gap between white students and one or more of the traditionally underserved student populations, but no state has done so across the board.

"More students from varied backgrounds are accomplishing their AP goals," said **Gaston Caperton, College Board president and former governor of West Virginia**, "but we can't afford to believe equity has been achieved until the demographics of successful AP participation and performance are identical to the demographics of the overall student population."

The complete report is available at
<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/ap-report-to-the-nation-2008.pdf>.

The *Education Week*'s analysis is available at
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/02/20/24ap.h27.html>.



DO YOUR HOMEWORK!: MetLife Survey Finds Connections Between Attitude About Homework and Student Achievement, Career Aspirations

Most teachers, students, and parents realize that homework is an important part of a student's educational development, according to the *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: The Homework Experience*, the latest in a series that MetLife started in 1984. What's more interesting is how teacher, student, and parental attitudes toward homework can shed light on many other aspects of education, such as a student's future goals and parents' attitudes toward their child's school.

“Homework is a frequent topic of conversation among parents, teachers and students, and that conversation often leads to larger discussions about teaching and learning, parenting, and preparation for work, college, and life,” said **MetLife Chairman and CEO Rob Henrikson**. “This survey shares the voices and perspectives of those closest to homework. We believe these views can stimulate discussions in homes, schools, and communities across the nation, help with teacher preparation, and contribute to an improvement in education.”

According to the report, large majorities of teachers (83 percent), parents (81 percent), and students (77 percent) believe that doing homework is “important or very important.” Teachers (91 percent), parents (89 percent), and students (69 percent) also agree that doing homework helps students learn more in school. However, in regard to the quality of homework, MetLife finds a disconnect between parents and teachers, with 33 percent of parents saying that the quality of homework assignments was “fair” or “poor,” compared to only 16 percent of teachers.

Additionally, a sizeable number of students say that their homework is not relevant to their current schoolwork or their future goals, with 26 percent saying that their homework is “busywork” and not related to what they are learning in school. Interestingly, one quarter of teachers agree, with 4 percent saying that a “great deal” of the homework they assign is busywork and 19 percent agreeing that “some” of their students' assignments are busywork.

At the secondary school level, 30 percent of students say that their homework is busywork—a large percentage, but much smaller than in 2002 when 74 percent of secondary school students said that their homework was busywork. Among secondary school teachers, 33 percent (compared to 18 percent of elementary school teachers) say that their homework assignments are busywork.

Turning to how frequently homework is assigned, MetLife finds that homework is a nearly daily part of school life for most students, with 77 percent of students surveyed assigned homework at least three days a week and 42 percent given homework every day. Among secondary school students, nearly half (46 percent) received homework assignments every school day. The report also finds that students who earn the best grades are the most likely to receive homework assignments. According to the report, 52 percent of students who receive mostly As have homework assigned to them every day, compared to only 43 percent for students who earn As and Bs and 34 percent of students who receive Cs or below.

Similar patterns emerged when students were asked how much time they spent on homework. According to the survey, 45 percent of students say that they spend at least one hour a day on

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homework. Among secondary school students, 50 percent spend at least one hour a day on homework, while 21 percent say that they spend two hours or more on homework. Nearly one in four (22 percent) of secondary school students report that they spend fifteen minutes or less doing homework on a typical school day.

Students who held a low opinion of homework or lacked time for their homework are more likely to be low-achieving and to be associated with other risk factors. For example, the report finds that students who do not believe their homework is important are more likely to get Cs or below (40 percent versus 27 percent), do not plan to go to college after high school (26 percent versus 15 percent), and rate the quality of their education as only “fair” or “poor” (29 percent versus 13 percent).

The complete report is available at

<http://www.metlife.com/WPSAssets/10124301191202765628V1FTeacherSurveyHomeworkFinal.pdf>.



STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESSES: A Focus on Boosting College Graduates in Ohio and on Retaining Quality Teachers in Wisconsin

In his state of the state address on February 6, **Ohio Governor Ted Strickland (D)** outlined a comprehensive proposal to increase the number of the state’s college graduates, noting that doing so had to be a clear priority for the state “if our citizens are going to have good jobs and rising incomes in the coming years.”

To meet the goal, Strickland proposed raising the quality of the college academic programs and guaranteeing that those prepared and qualified to enter college could afford to attend. He also called for an expansion of the newly created University System of Ohio so that potential students who were unable to attend a four-year college would have access to local campuses and programs flexible enough to meet their needs. “Whether through college or technical training, our young people must be brought up with the expectation that they need to continue their education beyond high school.”

Strickland also announced a “Seniors to Sophomores” plan in which twelfth graders who meet certain academic requirements may choose to spend their senior year, tuition free, at a University System of Ohio campus. He said the program is designed to “raise the aspirations of all students,” both those who feel disengaged from their high school studies and those who want to accelerate their college education. He explained that the program would also save families a significant amount of money, saying, “just think about the effect on a family’s budget when they save the cost of an entire year of college tuition.”

The governor took pride in recent national rankings that placed Ohio near the top for its education system. Specifically, he pointed to the state’s seventh-place ranking by *Education Week’s Quality Counts 2008* report that was based on six areas of performance and policy. Additionally, he said that the National Assessment of Educational Progress ranks Ohio in the top ten in all four of its measures. At the same time, Strickland stressed that more work needs to be

done. “But while we are holding our own with most states, we have not kept pace with much of the world,” he said. “And we still must work to ensure that all our schools can meet the needs of all our students in this globally competitive environment.”

To achieve his global-competitiveness vision, Strickland outlined several core principles that will guide his educational efforts. Included among them is a personalized education program that would identify how each individual student learns and employ the teaching methods appropriate to that student’s needs and abilities.

“Education is the central issue I face as governor. I am determined to bring real change and real results. But I am also determined to find the best answers. We are creating a blueprint for the future of our schools and our state. And we will take the time to get it right.”

Minnesota: Pawlenty Focuses on Recruiting Quality Teachers

Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty (R) made recruiting qualified teachers a priority in his state of the state speech on February 13. “We need to improve teaching and should start by expanding the talent pool for public educators in Minnesota,” he said. “The teaching profession is no longer consistently attracting top talent through traditional pathways. Predicted shortages of teachers with needed backgrounds like math and science are beginning to materialize.”

To attract qualified individuals from outside the teaching profession, Pawlenty focused on the need to expand opportunities for midcareer professionals to become teachers. He also stressed the importance of attracting young teachers into the profession. “We need to make it easier for such rising stars with needed subject matter expertise to have an alternative pathway into the profession, even though they may not have majored in education. Part of the attraction for these individuals will be a chance to spend some of their career in public service.”

Beyond recruitment, Pawlenty appealed to the state legislature to provide a 50 percent increase in funding for the state’s math and science teacher academies. Additionally, he proposed a summer institute that would train existing math and science teachers in teaching methods, curriculum, technology, and subject matter mastery and set a goal of training one thousand teachers over the next two years.

Pawlenty also discussed the need to implement a system of post-tenure review for teachers. “We can design this system in cooperation with the teachers’ unions, but it must get done,” he said. “It should include annual evaluations, access to additional training for improvement and a reasonable amount of time to correct deficiencies.”

More information on Pawlenty’s state of the state address, including a link to the full speech, is available at <http://www.governor.state.mn.us/mediacenter/pressreleases/PROD008677.html>.

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ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

1201 Connecticut Ave., NW
Suite 901
Washington, DC 20036

Phone 202 828-0828
Fax 202 828-0821
Alliance@all4ed.org
www.all4ed.org

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Bob Wise
President

Jason Amos
Editor

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