

THE MULTIPLIER MODEL FOR READING PROGRAMS



School districts can provide cost-effective reading instruction for all grades by building on existing programs and making efficient use of personnel.

IRENE T JELACIC

A decade ago conventional wisdom held that a student who hadn't learned to read by the end of sixth grade was doomed to failure. Fortunately, this is no longer true. The St. Paul, Minnesota, Public Schools have devised a plan that allows all secondary students to receive reading instruction. A "multiplier model" makes it possible to serve thousands of students with one reading teacher in a cost-effective manner. And results from annual standardized achievement tests confirm that the program works.

In 1975 a task force studied the reading needs of all the students in St. Paul, from kindergarten through high school. It recommended a management system to monitor the elementary program then in use; and for secondary students, a comprehensive reading program that would include developmental reading, remedial reading, reading for the gifted, and content-area reading. In 1976 the school

board approved a four-year phase-in model to implement these recommendations.

Luckily, St. Paul's Central High School was at that time a recipient of a McKnight Foundation grant,¹ which made it possible to work out a "multiplier model" for existing developmental reading classes. The Educational Assessment Service evaluated the developmental reading classes and found they were most effective for low- and middle-achieving students. Student progress was impressive.

The comprehensive secondary reading program is a four-pronged approach (developmental, remedial, gifted, content-oriented) similar to one designed by Shepherd (1978). One certified reading consultant is assigned to each secondary school to provide initial and continuous inservice to English teachers who then teach the developmental reading classes as part of the communications curriculum. The four to six English teachers per school serve hundreds of students in one building and thousands city-wide. Hence, the "multiplier model."

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In the content-area reading component, the reading consultant works directly with teachers in a wide variety of subject areas; the needs of teachers and students determine which areas are included. Initially, all secondary teachers attended a ten-hour inservice in content reading, which included rationale and evaluation (of textbooks and students) plus vocabulary, comprehension, and study skill techniques. This was followed by direct assistance in the classroom, providing teachers with study guides, vocabulary activities, and study techniques to give students better comprehension of the specific content course.

The other two components, remedial and gifted reading, have not been emphasized as much as the developmental and content-area components, and for good reason—fewer students are remedial or gifted.

The remedial reading options include federally-funded programs such as ESEA Titles I and VII, a variety of state-funded programs under a "special education" umbrella, and locally funded remedial programs when personnel and funds permit.

For gifted students, there is the Junior Great Books Program²—a program of interpretive reading and discussion at the junior high level. The senior high offers an intensive study skills course for students planning on post-secondary education. Requests for both of these programs usually exceed the number of sections available.



The model has been working well in St. Paul, with positive results. For instance, high school seniors who took the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test³ showed an average trimester gain of 1.8, which translates to one year, eight months growth in reading during a 12-week trimester. Students, as well as teachers, are excited about their improved reading scores. Teachers who used to say, "This kid can't read. What's the reading teacher going to do about it?" now say, "What can I do?" Principals sit in the front row for reading workshops and participate with their teachers.

The model used in St. Paul could be used anywhere. For further information contact the Superintendent's Office, St. Paul Public Schools, 360 Colborne Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55102. ■

¹ The McKnight Foundation encourages and promotes charitable, scientific, literary, and educational efforts. Suite 1701, Shelard Tower, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55426.

² The Great Books Foundation, 307 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60601.

³ The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test measures vocabulary, comprehension, speed, and accuracy. The Riverside Publishing Company, 1919 S. Highland Avenue, Lombard, Illinois 60148.

Reference

Shepherd, David L. *Comprehensive High School Reading Methods*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1978.

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