

Improving Reading Performance

What do you think is the single most important factor in dramatically improving students' reading performance in your school?

Themes in curriculum content and standards:

- Research-based core reading program
- Ongoing diagnosis
- Multiple strategies for intervention
- Integration of reading and writing
- Alignment to state frameworks

Reading programs in No Child Left Behind - Blue Ribbon Schools emphasize strong foundational skills, alignment with state and district standards, and a school-wide focus on reading. Teachers and parents are seen as critical players. Assessment is formative and ongoing. School comments about improved student reading performance are organized below by topic—curriculum, teaching, student support, and assessment—with illustrations from survey responses.



A. Curriculum content and standards

Blue Ribbon Schools approach reading programs mindful of the National Reading Panel findings that identify five key areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Curricula are aligned with district and state standards. Most Blue Ribbon Schools use research-based core reading programs, supplementing primary programs with intervention materials. They frequently assess students' progress toward meeting those standards, and adjust instruction as necessary to make certain every student reads on grade level.

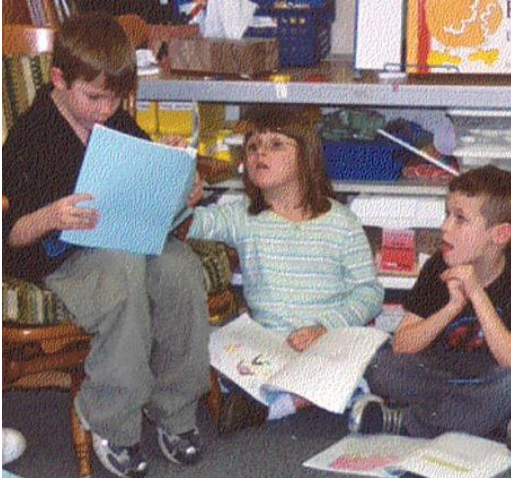
Richard D. White Elementary School Glendale, CA

“Reading and writing [are] taught daily with large blocks of uninterrupted time devoted to reading instruction. The curriculum is based on rigorous state standards and a matching Language Arts program. Instruction is balanced with emphasis on phonics, comprehension, and grammar. Reading and writing activities are embedded in all content areas. Our Read-a-Thon motivates and rewards students for reading outside the classroom. The Accelerated Reader program provides teachers with reading levels to target instruction, motivation for students to read, and comprehension tests to hone students' understanding of what they read.”

Louisa May Alcott Elementary School

Riverside, CA

“Students experience the rigor of grade-level text during whole-class reading instruction, with reinforcement and extension provided during small-group instruction as students work at their instructional levels. A wide variety of reading materials provides access for all students to increase reading comprehension skills, including recalling, sequencing, summarizing, making inferences, predicting, and drawing conclusions. A computer-based supplemental reading program, Reading Counts, develops reading fluency, pace, and comprehension while tracking individual student reading levels and progress through comprehension quizzes. This technology engages students, provides instantaneous feedback, and encourages students from all backgrounds to read more by providing resources and experiences at school.”



Mountain View Academy

Greeley, CO

“The school selected [Reading Mastery, a direct instruction program] because ...research strongly indicates that explicit instruction in phonemic-awareness, sound/letter and word recognition, and spelling, writing, and actual reading are critical elements for reading achievement. Reading Mastery incorporates all of these elements into its first two levels of reading instruction.”

Burrville Elementary School

Washington, DC

“Improving the reading skills of all students is a top priority at Burrville School. The reading block was increased from 90 minutes to 120 minutes. Reading skills are integrated in every subject area throughout the day. The writing process and Four Block reading model are used during the reading block. Special emphasis is placed on remediating group weaknesses and enrichment activities are defined to help students advance in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and spelling. Professional development activities have centered around the integration of reading throughout the curriculum and special workshops are held with parents during the year. RIF, IN2Books, and the Everybody Wins programs have provided special activities for students, books, and additional professional development activities for the teachers. School wide family and community ‘Read Ins’ are held at least three times a year.”

Dirksen Primary School

Pekin, IL

“Five years ago, our district moved from a site-based curriculum to a district-wide state standards-aligned curriculum. The district, through teacher curriculum writing teams, developed a backwards mapped Language Arts Curriculum that started with the final grade (8th grade since we are an elementary district) and clearly defined grade level state learning standards/processes that needed to be targeted, instructed upon, and assessed throughout the year. Once the 8th grade curriculum was defined, the next grade was defined and so forth until all LA curricula PreK-8th were developed and implemented. Access more information at <http://www.pekin.net/pekin108/curr/langarts/lang.html>.”

Joseph K. Lumsden Bahweting P.S.A. School

Sault Saint Marie, MI

“The single most important factor in dramatically improving students' reading performance at Joseph K. Lumsden Bahweting School is the implementation of Reading Strategies across the Curriculum with a strong connection to Writing. For grades K-3 these strategies include MLPP (Michigan Literacy Proficiency Profile), phonemic awareness and accuracy, site word recognition with meaning, responding to reading in writing, and running records. For grades 4-8 these strategies include vocabulary across the curriculum, responding to writing, comparing and contrasting, contextual inferences, spelling strategies that extend to Reading and Writing, opinion feedback, self and peer editing, and the finished product. We stress to the students that Reading and Writing is a cycle. They write from what they read, and others read what they write. This is in keeping with the Anishnabe Culture as everything is circularly connected. Lastly, we use rubrics for all Reading/Writing assignments for grades 3-8.”

Ravenscroft School

Raleigh, NC

“The single most important factor in dramatically improving students' reading performance in our school is making reading a priority throughout our curriculum. It is one of the main cornerstones of our curriculum. In Lower School we capitalize on small class sizes and early intervention with trained professionals to work with students who require support [and provide] a strong phonically based approach. In Middle School we continue by scheduling reading classes that are heterogeneously structured, providing students the opportunity to learn from one another and allowing teachers to assist all students as they develop fluency. Finally, in our Upper School reading continues as a priority that is embraced by the entire school including common readings for the community.”

Skidmore-Tynan Elementary School

Skidmore, TX

“All grades are focused on the necessity of strong reading skills. Without the development of critical reading skills, students in the state of Texas cannot be successful on any of the required state testing, as the math test is first a critical reading test to ascertain what math computation is involved. At Skidmore-Tynan Elementary, Kindergarten is heavily phonics-based along with a myriad of strategies for phonemic awareness and pre-reading. Grades 1-5 follow a consistent reading program involving a weekly instructional reading cycle. Each week vocabulary, a prioritized skill and an on-going skill (always a stated tested skill or a sub-skill of those skills), and in-depth comprehension incorporating critical reading strategies are expected to be taught by the teachers and mastered by the students as part of the instructional cycle. Weekly assessment happens at the end of each week.”

B. Teaching strategies

Differentiated instruction, multiple opportunities for reading, and integrating reading across the curricula are all important strategies for teaching reading in Blue Ribbon Schools. Small group instruction to accommodate students at different skill levels is critical. Teacher quality, considered of utmost importance, is enhanced through professional development opportunities that emphasize research-based reading instruction.

Themes in teaching strategies:

- Teamwork
- Shared expertise
- All teachers teach reading strategies

Neil Armstrong School

San Ramon, CA

“Teaching strategies include:

- Flexible grouping
- Explicit teaching using best practices
- Study groups (strategies that work)
- Planning lessons aligned with the standards
- Collecting evidence (multiple measures) to show student progress
- Guided reading in primary
- Comprehension program that spans grades 3-5
- Reading intervention programs “

Horace Mann Elementary School

Washington, DC

“Teachers at Horace Mann Elementary school . . . use a balanced variety of instructional practices that include teaching of phonics, listening to discussions and skills, spelling and language mechanics, vocabulary and higher order thinking skills such as generalization from detail, deduction, and inference. . . . Teachers provide mini-lessons in the workshop that address evolving problems and challenges with increasingly difficult and varied types of text. The school library is the matrix for our reading program, circulating 1,200- 2,000 books per month to 235 students while providing teachers and students with books that match reading levels and interests.”



***Roosevelt Elementary School
Belleville, IL***

“We believe that our teamwork accounts for improved performance; we focus on the same goals, articulate strategies across grade levels, and share our expertise without concern for territorial boundaries.”

T. C. Cherry Elementary School

Bowling Green, KY

“The school's High Performance Management Committee researched and developed a literacy plan requiring an emphasis on job-embedded professional development, early intervention and prevention, instructional strategies for English language learners, and curriculum. T. C. Cherry teachers participated in extensive training in Reading Mastery, Junior Great Books, the writing process, the Kentucky Reading Project, and the Curry/Samara model of unit development.”

Saint Edward the Confessor School

Metairie, LA

“The school uses a sequential schoolwide reading program supplemented by enrichment programs and activities. Students use multiple strategies such as phonics, context clues, and pictures to construct the meaning of a text. Students use a variety of learning strategies, personal skills, and time management skills to create quality work.”

Benjamin Franklin High School

New Orleans, LA

“Although our English teachers work energetically and rigorously to teach reading and higher level thinking skills through analysis, close readings, and metacognition, we have made the development of reading skills a priority in all academic disciplines. Summer readings were assigned in all academic areas and integrated into the curriculum. Students are taught how to read the discipline's material, and teachers, in preparing students for national and state exams, practice the strategies of reading and writing on a weekly basis. Course syllabi, two-week plans, and lesson plans reflect the integration of reading into the core curriculum and the use of student data to address skills, and teachers in all academic areas have assumed the leadership in working together across the curriculum to solidify reading skills for all students. The strong AP program in the school reinforces this reading goal.”

Summit Park Elementary School

Baltimore, MD

“The single most important factor in dramatically improving students' reading performance is effective teachers. Teachers have a deep understanding of the content standards. Teachers consistently teach specific before, during, and after reading strategies. Instruction is consistent from grade to grade and classroom to classroom based on proven effective strategies. Teachers understand that high quality performance from students requires quality time to read and think. Instructional time is focused and maximized by a high level of preparedness by every teacher.”

Saint Patrick School

Chatham, NJ

“By utilizing educational research and practices, the school combines that which has been traditionally successful with new methodology. The reading curriculum begins in the pre-school with a reading readiness program that includes print concepts, sound symbol relationships, language acquisition, and listening comprehension. In Kindergarten, students continue with this program and add phonics, sight word recognition, and word families. Students in grades one and two continue with all of these skills and add reading fluency and comprehension. Students are given the necessary support so they become proficient in reading by grade three. On every grade level, students are exposed to high quality literature and a variety of reading genres. Our school employs teaching strategies that will meet intended outcomes and individualizes the delivery of instruction when necessary. Students read trade books and are assigned outside reading, as well as summer reading.”

W. W. Scarborough Elementary School

Houston, TX

“People are the key—we have invested in training, using district personnel and other local resources. Our staff includes two intervention specialists who work with teachers and students. Teacher aides work with students, as does the administration. We provide release time for teachers to engage in professional dialogue and share successful strategies. Ancillary teachers include literacy activities in their lessons. At Scarborough, everyone truly is a reading teacher.”

Newport High School

Bellevue, WA

“Teachers in all content and elective areas are taught reading strategies and skills to share with their students. We don't solely rely on English teachers to teach reading. Students are required to read year round, with the inclusion of a required novel and study guide for each grade in the summer.”

C. Early intervention and student support

Blue Ribbon Schools maintain strong support for all students, regardless of whether they qualify for special programs. At the same time, the schools are committed to early intervention with students who need extra help in reading. Parent involvement is considered a natural and important step to success by many schools. Home reading by students is encouraged.

Themes in early intervention and student support:

- Early identification
- Flexible grouping
- Extended day instruction
- Tutors
- Parent involvement
- Use of volunteers
- Reading is taught 90 minutes daily

Forest Park Elementary School

Fremont, CA

“The school uses multiple measures to determine areas of need or emphasis for identified students. There is a lot of collaboration and discussion about identified students in order to determine the best avenues for effecting progress. The school also intervenes as early as possible and makes every attempt to involve parents in every aspect of the student's educational program.”

Walnut Grove Elementary School

Pleasanton, CA

“Many efforts have been coordinated to [effect] a powerful program of instruction in grades K-5. Perhaps the most

significant factor has been our attention to learners at the far ends of the literacy spectrum. We assess all students regularly and identify those who need additional help. [The intervention program] provides before and after school instruction (4x week) in small, intense groups (6 students maximum). We also provide a “Homework Club” for students who fall in the ‘gray-area’ between ‘intervention’ and our ‘regular’ program of instruction. Advanced learners receive differentiated instruction, which includes ‘Individual Learning Plans.’ These plans are student-driven and often involve rather sophisticated research.”

Meadowview Elementary Year-Round School

Atlanta, GA

“By virtue of overall performance, Meadowview was selected by the state as a pilot school for the Reading First Program. The three hours of uninterrupted instruction provided the essential time needed to achieve an integrated language arts program thereby proving beneficial to the student population as a whole. Students were provided differentiated instruction and were carefully monitored and assessed to ensure progress.”

William Howard Taft Elementary School

Boise, ID

“We schedule students in small and large groups in order to meet their needs, provide paraprofessionals with specific skills/concepts to work on with individual students, and move students in and out of flexible small groups based on their attainment of specific skills/concepts on a daily/weekly basis. We focus our horizontal and vertical collaborative team meetings on specific data which then drives our classroom instruction.”

Orleans Elementary School

Orleans, MA

“The K-2 Early Literacy Program is scheduled for 120 minutes of uninterrupted instruction in reading, writing, and oral communication. Within this time period, students receive individualized and small group instruction that is based on information ascertained from DIBELS and the grades 1 and 2 Literacy Benchmarks Assessment. Classroom teachers, Title I, Special Education teachers, Speech and Language Pathologists, and trained educational assistants provide direct instructional services. Instruction focuses on the five essential components of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension strategies.”

Glenridge Elementary School

Clayton, MO

“We monitor each student's progress in reading with quarterly learning support meetings and support is in place for students who are struggling. The support that we provide is critical for students' success.”

Pierre Laclède Elementary School

St. Louis, MO

“As a school community [we] conduct diagnostic screening during the first and/or second week of school, compile the results, [and develop] an Individual Advancement Plan. . . to guide instructional delivery along with moving the reading specialist to the classroom to collaborate with the classroom teacher.”

John F. Kennedy Middle School

Utica, NY

“The single most important factor in dramatically improving students' reading performance at JFK is a focused ‘time on task approach’ inspired, promoted, and supported by an aggressive administrative leadership in a highly structured disciplinary atmosphere that produces the climate for optimum teaching and learning. Students are taught a commonly agreed upon articulated curriculum. Common curriculum, strategies, and techniques are taught in English classes, English Language Arts classes, Academic Intervention Services classes, and in-school and after-school tutorials.”



***Saint Luke School
Barrington, RI***

“In the primary grades, individualized instruction takes place in small groups and exposes students to a variety of teaching styles. Our aim is to have all students reading at or

above grade level before they enter fourth grade. At that time a cross-graded reading program is implemented and most students are grouped according to their reading levels. Reading and writing are integrated disciplines and are taught as a cohesive unit. Challenging literature is provided for students and trade books are used with basal texts and primary sources to enhance curriculum and unit subjects.”

Short Pump Elementary School

Richmond, VA

“The single most important factor in improving student performance in reading is ensuring that each child receives a strong instructional program that will meet his or her individual learning needs. The reading program for all students should be based upon rigorous standards and should be driven by results of weekly assessments. The reading program should be delivered through a collaborative effort involving the classroom teacher and support services that include special education, Primary Reading Instruction and Math Education (PRIME), English as a Second Language (ESL), and other resource personnel.”

Jessup Elementary School

Cheyenne, WY

“The single most important fact in improving students' reading performance is an organized balanced literacy framework designed from our study of research-based effective reading instructional strategies. A Jessup school improvement goal focuses on improving reading comprehension at all grade levels. An action plan has specific interventions that are implemented and monitored. A staff development plan provides ongoing training and mentoring for staff.”

D. Importance of assessment

Assessment at Blue Ribbon Schools is formative, not just evaluative, and continuous. It guides teachers in developing lessons and intervention strategies, and in providing differentiated instruction.

Themes in assessment:

- Consistency
- Individualized programs
- Instruction based on assessment
- Curriculum based on assessment
- Multiple measures

Forest Park Elementary School Fremont, CA

“The school uses multiple measures for data analysis to determine areas of need or emphasis for identified students. There is a lot of collaboration and discussion about identified students in order to determine the best avenues for effecting progress. The school also intervenes as early as possible and makes every attempt to involve parents in every aspect of the student's educational program.”

Twin Creeks Elementary School

San Ramon, CA

“Along with ongoing training on best practices, teachers participate in ongoing assessment of students' reading abilities and use this in their design of daily lessons. This is used for classroom work, as well as for interventions. The knowledge we have of our students drives the instruction in the classroom.”

Joseph Rodman West Elementary School

Washington, DC

“To augment the D.C.P.S. standards-based curriculum, teachers use technology and enrichment activities designed to meet the needs of all students: Developing strength and weakness profiles for students from a variety of ongoing assessments, achieving students' goals through tracking/monitoring of student progress, and using data disaggregation and analysis to improve school, teacher, and student performance. Reading benchmark tests and alternative assessments are used to assess the effectiveness of skill mastery, ensuring alignment with D.C.P.S. pacing charts.”

Dirksen Primary School

Pekin, IL

“District Language Arts criterion-based assessments were . . . developed for each grade level to be taken in the Fall, Winter, and Spring. These formative tests, along with individual student portfolios, help staff and students monitor learning progress in meeting and exceeding [standards]. More information at:
<http://www.pekin.net/pekin108/curr/langarts/lang.html>.”

Charity Dye Elementary School # 27

Indianapolis, IN

“The single most important factor in improving students' reading performance lies in the area of consistent assessment using benchmark tests. This test actually serves as a prescription for each child and enables teachers to strategize and modify instructions for the students.”

Custer Hill Elementary School

Fort Riley, KS

“Faculty involvement and implementation of research-based programs and targeted strategies are utilized across all grade levels. Programs include the Four Block Framework, Soar to Success and Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI). Target strategies implemented from the School Improvement Plan are Graphic Organizers and Question/Answer/Response (QAR). The effectiveness of the programs and targeted strategies is enhanced by the correlation between our disaggregated data and student needs.”

Guardian Angels School

Clawson, MI

“Test scores are studied by the instructors and individual outcomes are used to individualize class instruction. Diagnostics are routinely administered on an individual basis and a resource room is used to improve skills of at-risk and learning disabled readers. The faculty works together.”

Lone Dell Elementary School

Arnold, MO

“We . . . use the many evaluative and diagnostic reports to better assist students within their independent reading levels. This has allowed us to differentiate a portion of the child's reading instruction to provide the opportunity for individual success.”