More than half of 4th graders in Connecticut read below grade level, whatever their race, means or gender. And at the bottom of the state’s achievement gap—the largest in the nation—are unfathomable numbers of Black and Hispanic 4th graders who can’t read on grade level—a staggering 88% and 85%, respectively. ¹ This is a crisis.

The tentacles of reading failure put a stranglehold on our society—emotionally, practically, and economically. In Connecticut, forecasts for future prison construction are based on Grade 3 reading failure rates. It costs more than twice as much per year to house a prisoner as it does to educate a child.², ³

Learning to read is a civil right. We have a moral and ethical imperative to teach all of our children well, now. This is a call to action.

Now the good news. Today, comprehensive, effective reading instruction is being delivered in a growing number of schools in Connecticut—with promising results. Understanding how children learn to read—and how to teach reading—is every teacher’s right. We have the ability to bring this knowledge to every teacher and child in Connecticut. But do we have the will?

Welcome to the first issue of The Reading Leader. We seek to inform and inspire you as a positive change agent for reading achievement. Whether you are a teacher or parent, principal or other administrator, researcher or legislator, we encourage you to listen to the voice of evidence and to make a commitment of conscience so every child can learn to read.⁴

As Reading Leaders, we believe:

❖ above all, it’s about the kids
❖ in setting the bar high, and helping teachers and students reach it
❖ in comprehensive, scientifically-based reading instruction for kids and in effective coaching and classroom support for teachers
❖ teachers—not programs or products—teach children to read
❖ evidence-based practices must be at the heart of teacher education, from pre-service through lifelong professional development
❖ assessments should align with specific, rigorous content standards
❖ quality assessments should drive differentiated instruction
❖ in being lifelong learners, conducting research, evaluating new data, and applying enhanced understanding
❖ in strong leadership, putting aside politics and joining forces to affect real change. ❖

³Connecticut State Department of Education, www.csde.state.ct.us
⁴Lyon, G.R. (1999, Feb.20). The science of learning to read and the art of teaching. Summary of Dr. Reid Lyon’s lecture message by Scott Flemming. Approximately 95% of all children can be taught to read.
Myth Busting

The Reading Leader

Summer 2007

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Achievement First.

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Myth

There are Two Ways to Teach Reading:
Focus on Phonics or Concentrate on Comprehension

Reality

The Haskins Approach is Comprehensive:
Combining Systematic, Explicit Content and Coaching

Some skeptics still buy in to the myth that Haskins professional development is centered entirely on phonics—maybe because “phonemic awareness” was discovered at Haskins Laboratories in the 1970s. This groundbreaking concept asserts that contribute to decoding as well as those that enhance listening comprehension.

Comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading—and accordingly, the ultimate goal of HLI’s comprehensive professional development.

A substantial body of research has demonstrated that skilled reading and writing require the smooth and automatic interplay of five key components—phoneme awareness, phonics (to “decode” accurately), fluency (reading text automatically and with intonation), vocabulary (knowing what words mean), and text comprehension (constructing meaning by connecting text with prior knowledge)—all based on language proficiency.

HLI professional development is designed to cover all five components of effective reading instruction, systematically delivered over two years: Year 1 for phonemic awareness, phonics/ code instruction and fluency, and Year 2 for vocabulary and text comprehension, including oral language development. We also include explicit instruction in handwriting, spelling and writing skills.

At times, HLI mentors just chuckle at the bad joke that they are “phonicators.” But in reality, it’s no laughing matter when this misconception robs teachers and students of state-of-the-art reading instruction.

Success Story

Hartford Students and Author Share Teachable Moments at Book Donation Celebration

On May 23, K-2 students at Hartford’s Sarah J. Rawson and Noah Webster elementary schools experienced lessons in generosity and gratitude, and shared the success of their early reading experiences when they met author Laura Appleton-Smith.

Appleton-Smith and her husband Terry are the hearts and minds behind Flyleaf Publishing, creators of engaging, illustrated books that look like “authentic literature” but are phonetically decodable. They follow a specific sequence that increases in difficulty as skills are mastered. The author had the opportunity to play fairy godmother when she learned that her in-laws wanted to give back to Hartford, where Elenor Smith had grown up, by making a substantial donation of Flyleaf books and teaching materials. Appleton-Smith was excited, but also emphatic that the gifts land in schools where they would be used appropriately. As a primary school teacher, she has carefully designed and sequenced the series to develop skills including knowledge of sound/spelling correspondences, automaticity, fluency and comprehension.

By contacting Dr. Margie Gillis at the Haskins Literacy Initiative (HLI), she found help to make the magic happen. For the past three years, HLI has been providing professional development in five Hartford Public Schools, most recently under a grant from The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. HLI mentors had the desire and the expertise to ensure that teachers would welcome the windfall to supplement their core reading curriculum. As a result, complete sets of the Books to Remember Series, Short Sentence Series and teacher’s guides were donated to every kindergarten, first and second grade classroom at Rawson, Noah Webster, Moylan, Maria C. Sanchez and Fred Wish schools.

Linda Liss-Bronstein, who organized the book celebration, is HLI’s mentor at Rawson and Webster schools. This past year, she has focused on providing engaging, robust vocabulary development, using Braily™—a story grammar tool—and with the technique “Questioning the Author,” (Beck). “I am observing first and second graders inferring meaning and expanding their vocabulary. It has been so exciting to see the enthusiasm of children responding to a greater rigor of comprehension instruction with elaborate oral and written expression.” As the author so expertly questioned at the event (see below), no doubt Appleton-Smith would agree. What better reward than to have Hartford’s children read, understand, and adore her books—thanks to gifts that will keep on giving. And thanks to Elenor and Frank Smith.

Appleton-Smith was delighted with story retells written by second graders in Heather McKeeney’s class. This reading comprehension assignment was proof positive that teachers and students have learned the lessons that the author and Haskins intended.
Meet Our Mentors

Dr. Evelyn Russo’s Quest to Learn How to Teach Reading
Lands her at Haskins Laboratories

After spending a dozen years teaching 3rd, 4th and 5th graders, completing a Masters degree in bilingual and bicultural studies, and receiving a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction, Evelyn Russo still didn’t know how to insure that all of her students would become proficient readers. The spitfire blonde, with energy and enthusiasm as high and bright as her 1-inch red patent pumps, and a natural inclination towards perfectionism, isn’t one to give up. But her well-seasoned mix of motivating students, hand picking engaging books, and serving up limitless patience wasn’t enough. She needed the right tools to help students lift words from the page.

Russo stumbled onto solutions quite by accident when, on the advice of a colleague, she visited Haskins Laboratories. “As soon as I met Anne Fowler, I knew she could help me learn what I didn’t know about how to teach reading,” she recalls. Fowler, a Haskins Senior Scientist (now deceased), had been instrumental in assembling and serving on The Early Reading Success Panel that published the acclaimed “Connecticut’s Study of Reading.”  Fowler, a Haskins mentor ever since—through the Mastering Reading Instruction study that followed and now with Haskins Literacy Initiative. Russo works with public and private schools in Hamden.

Teachers Need the Right Tools

Reflecting on how her extensive education failed to adequately prepare her to teach reading, Russo is adamant about instruction, the complexity of teaching reading becomes simplified and more concrete. By using informal assessments, teachers can find the perfect point of instruction for each student. That takes out the guesswork, and teaching kids to read becomes easier and much more fun. Teachers are more effective, students are engaged and no longer frustrated.”

Moving teachers towards mastery of reading instruction requires excellent training, however, as well as plenty of time to practice. “It’s not a matter of repeating the story. Adults might use pictures and are the illustrator’s interpretation of the story. But, reading aloud is so important and how to maximize its benefits. Wilder explains how to prompt and question in ways that make kids think critically and verbalize better. Asking open-ended questions that can’t be answered with simple “yes,” “no,” or rote responses encourages kids to reason and to interpret what the author is saying. In turn, providers reinforce and leverage this newfound knowledge by sharing techniques with parents. As their children’s first teachers, parents can help promote more conversation by encouraging them to form thoughtful answers, instead of quick responses. Presto! The simple, loving act of sharing a book is transformed into an intentional and effective “backpack” filler.

“Research based teacher education is critical, must be given at the pre-service level and can’t be left to chance….At the very least, every pre-K through Grade 3 teacher needs this knowledge. To me, that is non-negotiable.”

Helping Hartford’s Preschoolers Get Ready to Learn How to Read

Over the past year, the Haskins Literacy Initiative (HLI) has worked with the Mayor’s Office for Young Children to fill the backpacks—and prime the brains—of Hartford’s preschoolers with knowledge, skills, and experiences so that they will be ready to learn how to read when they cross the threshold into kindergarten. According to Executive Director José Colón-Rivas, Ph.D., “The Haskins Literacy Initiative is enabling pre-K children in Hartford to become successful early readers by providing high quality, comprehensive pre-literacy instruction and support in pre-K classrooms.” This partnership aligns with “Ready by 5 & Fine by 9,” Connecticut’s Early Childhood Investment Framework prepared by the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet.

Closing the 30 Million Word Gap

“Research based teacher education is critical, must be given at the pre-service level and can’t be left to chance….At the very least, every pre-K through Grade 3 teacher needs this knowledge. To me, that is non-negotiable.”

In the world of reading development, “filling the backpack” isn’t about snacks, jackets or crayons. It refers to the research finding that children from economically disadvantaged families hear 30 million fewer words spoken by age three compared with children from more advantaged backgrounds (Hart and Risley, 2003). How can preschool teachers begin to make up the difference in the number of words children experience early in life, filling their language and reading-readiness backpacks?

One way to boost spoken language is through enjoyable—and purposeful—experiences with books. A preschooler may think s(he) is just listening to an interesting story, but, with HLI’s help, story time instills more than the love of literature. Through monthly professional development workshops, carefully planned lessons, practicing new techniques with other adults, and watching weekly classroom demonstrations by Haskins Literacy Specialist T. Diane Wilder, preschool providers are learning why reading aloud is so important and how to maximize its benefits. Wilder explains how to prompt and question in ways that make kids think critically and verbalize better. Asking open-ended questions that can’t be answered with simple “yes,” “no,” or rote responses encourages kids to reason and to interpret what the author is saying. In turn, providers reinforce and leverage this newfound knowledge by sharing techniques with parents. As their children’s first teachers, parents can help promote more conversation by encouraging them to form thoughtful answers, instead of quick responses. Presto! The simple, loving act of sharing a book is transformed into an intentional and effective “backpack” filler.

Rewiring Speaking Brains for Reading

The human brain is naturally hard-wired for speaking. Not so for reading. In order to extract meaning from written symbols, different brain regions must work as a team. Each must be primed, then the team must practice, practice, practice. Book-sharing lessons also aim to bring children to the ultimate understanding that our language is based on an alphabet where sounds (letters) represent the sounds in words. One way to convey this “alphabetic principle” is to point to the words while reading.

This also teaches “concepts of print” and introduces “concept of word,” the important distinction between words—which are read by the teacher to convey meaning—and pictures—which can be used to elaborate on the author’s words and are the illustrator’s interpretation of the story. Adults might use pictures after the story is read to encourage children to discuss how a character felt or what s(he) decided to do—both important elements in stories and narrative development.

(Continued on Page 6)
Dr. Evelyn Russo (continued from page 4)

Helping Hartford’s Preschoolers (continued from page 5)

In order to become ready to learn how to read, preschoolers must start to develop phonemic awareness (PA), the essential, but abstract idea that words can be broken up into sounds. With Wilder’s guidance, providers learn how to translate this difficult concept into engaging preschool-level play by selecting certain words from the books they are reading. PA lessons come to life as 3-and 4-yr-olds pluck each sound from a student’s mouth as s/he says the word Ink has depicted. While wearing a blindfold to attune its enormous Spock-like ears solely to sounds, Sonar playfully tosses each onto a sound marker (vowel sounds are red, consonants blue) displayed on a soundboard. Last, but not least, Link joins in, ready to connect sound to “code”. With unblinking eyes atop insect-like stalks, Link surveys a letter board, finding the right red or blue alphabetic symbol to attach to each sound. Meaning, sound system, code patterns—the abstract becomes concrete with this engaging demonstration by otherworldly teachers. The measure of success for Russo’s innovative lesson? Even the most recalcitrant first graders vie to participate, although it’s well into the afternoon, the energetic low tide of a school day. It’s hard to say whether it’s the Haskins mentor or the puppets who have them hooked. No matter. Like Russo, they are learning that the right approach to reading instruction will make the concepts stick.

“Providers reinforce and leverage this newfound knowledge by sharing techniques with parents. As their children’s first teachers, parents can help promote more conversation by encouraging them to form thoughtful answers, instead of quick responses.”

"Response to Instruction (RTI) One-Day Summer Institute"

Friday, August 10, 2007, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Albertus Magnus College, 700 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT

Co-sponsored by Haskins Literacy Initiative & CT Branch of the International Dyslexia Association

$80.00 registration fee (CONNIDA member fee $75.00) Lunch provided CEUs offered for Connecticut educators

Response to Instruction or RTI (also known as Response to Intervention) suggests alternative models for serving and identifying students with learning disabilities. The successful implementation of RTI rests on quality classroom instruction for all students and research-proven intervention. RTI represents the departure from identification and intervention models for learning disabilities that disconnect identification and instruction. Some of the major features of RTI models from different perspectives, including cognitive processes, the brain and instruction will be presented.

Keynote Address: Why RTI? Enhancing Outcomes for All Students 9-10:30
Jack Fletcher, Ph.D., University of Texas-Houston

Speakers for Breakout Sessions Morning (10:45-12) and Afternoon (1:00-2:15) Choose on registration form

Haskins Literacy Initiative Specialists, Haskins Laboratories, “What Should Tier One Instruction Look Like? HLI’s Comprehensive Literacy Instruction”
Ken Pugh, Ph.D., Haskins Laboratories and Yale University, “Methodological Issues in Neuroimaging Studies of Reading and Reading Disability: Establishing Brain-Behavior Links”
Maureen Ruby, Eastern Connecticut State University, “RTI’s Three Tiers of Involvement: School, Parent, Child”
Tom Scarice, Principal, Two Rivers Middle Magnet School, East Hartford, “RTI Goes to School”
Brandi Simonsen, Ph.D., University of Connecticut, “The Other Side of the Triangle: Three Tiers of School-wide Positive Behavior Support”
Deborah Speece, Ph.D., University of Maryland, “RTI and Learning Disabilities: History, Research, and Future Directions”

Panel Discussion 2:30-4:00
For further information and driving directions, go to our website at www.haskins.yale.edu/hli or call 203-865-6163, ext. 247.

Response to Instruction (RTI) Registration Form

Please respond by July 20, 2007

Name ____________________________ Mailing Address ________________________________________________________________________________________________

Phone Number ____________________ Email address ____________________________________________________________

Would you like to be added to our list-serve? _____Yes _____No

Tell us more about your job (Title, Affiliation, School district)

Please rank 1-6 your preference for breakout sessions:

_____ Haskins Literacy Specialists _____ Ken Pugh _____ Maureen Ruby

_____ Tom Scarice _____ Brandi Simonsen _____ Deborah Speece

Return this registration form with a check payable to Haskins Laboratories in the amount of $80.00 ($75.00 for CONNIDA members) to: Kim Herard, Haskins Laboratories, 300 George Street, Suite 900, New Haven, CT 06511.
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Keynote Address: Why RTI? Enhancing Outcomes for All Students
Jack Fletcher, Ph.D., Keynote Speaker

Jack M. Fletcher, Ph.D., is a Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the University of Houston. For the past 30 years, Dr. Fletcher, a child neuro-psychologist, has completed research on many aspects of the development of reading, language, and other cognitive skills in children. Dr. Fletcher directs a Learning Disability Research Center grant funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. He served on the NICHD National Advisory Council, the Rand Reading Study Group, the National Research Council Committee on Scientific Principles in Education Research, and the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education. Dr. Fletcher was the recipient of the Samuel T. Orton award from the International Dyslexia Association in 2003 and a co-recipient of the Albert J. Harris award from the International Reading Association in 2006.

More information and registration form inside.

Registration Inside

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