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Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding strategies that administrators can implement with teachers for improving literacy at the high school level. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the ten regional educational laboratories (REL) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on research based education questions.

The information below represents the most rigorous research available. Researchers consider the type of methodology and give priority to research reports that employ well described and thorough methods. The resources were also selected based on the date of the publication with a preference for research from the last ten years. Additional criteria for inclusion include the source and funder of the resource.

**Question:** *For high school students who are reading substantially below their grade level, what strategies can administrators implement with teachers for improving literacy?*

**Key words and search strings used in the search:** *reading improvement AND high schools AND principals; improving literacy AND school leaders AND high school students; high school leaders' influence; AND teachers AND decreasing achievement gap*

**Search databases and websites:**

1. ERIC: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>
2. JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/action/showAdvancedSearch>
3. Google Scholar: [www.google.com/scholar](http://www.google.com/scholar)
4. Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Resources: <http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/>
5. What Works Clearinghouse: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

**Citations Retrieved: (NOTE: Abstracts and executive summaries are copied directly from the reports when possible to ensure accuracy):**

**Results:**

Based on the database searches described above, there were no causal studies on this topic. Below are some related articles and resources to guide your search for information pertinent to your question.

Au, K. H. (2013). Helping high schools meet higher standards. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 56(7), 535-539. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1013154>

**Abstract/Summary:** Educational policy in the U.S. currently centers on college and career readiness, with the spotlight is on high schools to meet higher expectations for students' literacy achievement. Ever-rising expectations are consistent with the U.S. standards movement, now in

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its third iteration. As funding for school improvement becomes increasingly scarce, high schools must try to do more with less. A focused, disciplined approach to literacy improvement is recommended, based on three major actions. First, school leaders should build the infrastructure to support a multi-year literacy improvement effort. Second, they should teach teachers to view each new standards document as an opportunity to examine and, when necessary, raise their expectations for students' literacy learning. Language suggesting that teachers must adopt or comply with standards runs counter to this approach. Finally, leaders should have teachers take ownership of literacy improvement efforts through building their own staircase curricula.

Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy. (2010). *Time to act: An agenda for advancing adolescent literacy for college and career success*. New York, NY: Carnegie Corporation of New York. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED535318>

**Abstract/Summary:** Our nation's educational system has scored many extraordinary successes in raising the level of reading and writing skills in younger children. Yet the pace of literacy improvement in our schools has not kept up with the accelerating demands of the global knowledge economy. In state after state, the testing data mandated by No Child Left Behind reveals a marked decline in the reading and writing skills of adolescent learners. School systems are now grappling with the fact that promising early performance and gains in reading achievement often dissipate as students move through the middle grades. As a result, many young people drop out of high school or perform at minimal level and end up graduating without the basic skills that they need to do college-level work, get a well-paying job or act as informed citizens. The truth is that good early literacy instruction does not inoculate students against struggle or failure later on. Beyond grade 3, adolescent learners in our schools must decipher more complex passages, synthesize information at a higher level, and learn to form independent conclusions based on evidence. They must also develop special skills and strategies for reading text in each of the differing content areas (such as English, science, mathematics and history)—meaning that a student who "naturally" does well in one area may struggle in another. To reach the goal of providing quality literacy instruction for all our nation's adolescents, we must systematically link instruction to the growing knowledge base on literacy and inform it with up-to-date data relating to outcomes and best practices. We must also find and support good teachers and provide them with the right professional development opportunities. Schools, districts, states, and federal policymakers all have vital roles to play in the process of re-engineering the nation's schools to support adolescent learning. Accordingly: (1) *The Vision: Literacy for All* draws on up-to-date research showing that adolescents need a higher level of literacy than ever before, both for college-readiness and employment in the new global knowledge economy, and goes on to describe how our current state of knowledge already equips us to re-engineer schools to support quality adolescent learning; (2) *The Challenge: What It Will Take to Get Our Adolescents College and Career Ready* details the specific literacy needs of adolescent learners and shows how these needs can best be met in our

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nation's schools; (3) *The Keys: Underpinnings for Successful Reform* shows how professional development for teachers and the effective use of data are the keys to improving adolescent literacy and realizing the ambitious goal of "literacy for all"; (4) *The Agenda: Re-Engineering for Change At All Levels* sets out a national agenda for fully supporting adolescent learners, using case-studies to show exactly how schools, districts, and states can help to re-engineer the experience of adolescent learning; and (5) *A Call To Action: Where To Begin* summarizes the main points of this report by setting out specific action steps for school leaders, district leaders, state leaders, and federal policymakers. Our common goal must be to ensure that all students receive the support they need for active citizenship, college and career readiness, gainful employment in the global knowledge economy, and lifelong learning.

Crum, K. (2008). The need for renewed literacy leadership efforts at the secondary level. *International Electronic Journal for leadership in Learning*, 12(15).  
<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ940602>

**Abstract/Summary:** Evidence indicates that secondary level students are not making adequate reading progress to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) by 2013-2014. According to The Education Trust, reading skills of African American and Latino high school seniors are not commensurate with the reading skills of white middle school students. The 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that "White students, on average, scored higher than Black and Hispanic students" on the eighth grade reading assessments. Large achievement gaps are notable throughout the United States. There is an overwhelming need to refocus the understanding, direction, and efforts of secondary administrators towards effective literacy achievement in the schools. A systemic change needs to be enacted at the school, district and higher education levels. This change must reflect a revision in principal focus to meet the achievement needs of all students. At the building level, the principal must revise current supervision and leadership practices, as well as change the organizational and academic structure of the school to ensure a cross-curricular approach is being taken to effective literacy. At the district level, leaders must ensure that principals are not over tasked with duties not pertinent to instruction, allowing the building leaders time and flexibility to implement and monitor best literacy practices. It also requires more district level assistance for principals to help foster an understanding of what is the best approach to literacy within each building and across disciplines. Finally, institutes of higher education must revise principal preparation programs to reflect the immediate need for principals to be proficient in effective literacy practices across curricular areas and how to successfully implement these practices with all staff. The author contends that through an integrated effort at the building, district, and higher education levels, it is possible to direct instructional practices at the secondary level to focus on literacy to effect high student achievement across all disciplines.

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Rissman, L. M., Miller, D. H., & Torgesen, J. K. (2009). *Adolescent literacy walk-through for principals: A guide for instructional leaders*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED521604>

**Abstract/Summary:** The purpose of this "Adolescent Literacy Walk-Through for Principals" ("ALWP") is to help principals monitor and support adolescent literacy instruction in their schools more effectively. To meet the goals of improving adolescent literacy in grades four through twelve, principals must be familiar with what literacy instruction should include and how to assess the quality of classroom literacy instruction quickly and effectively. The "ALWP" can be used to build a secondary school leader's literacy knowledge and to provide guidelines for structuring schoolwide professional development. As they work with teachers to improve instruction, school leaders could use this guide to help monitor literacy instruction in (1) late elementary school, (2) content-area classes in middle and high school, and (3) intervention groups or classes. The information gathered may be useful in planning and implementing ongoing professional development to support effective literacy instruction in individual classrooms and across grade levels and subject areas. This document assumes more than a beginning level of knowledge of reading and reading instruction. It summarizes research in adolescent literacy instruction and provides a resource to help convey the messages of state policy and research-based reading instruction through templates that principals may use. This "ALWP" is offered as a scaffold to build principals' understanding of scientifically based reading instruction, both as a means for gathering information about the quality of literacy and reading intervention instruction in a school, and as a data collection guide for planning targeted professional development and resource allocation. Policies and materials to support policies can influence classroom implementation when (1) teachers have opportunity to learn what the policy means for their practice, (2) there is coherent interpretation within the state framework of policies, but also from the classroom to the state level, and (3) support is available for innovation, even when it requires considerable effort (Cohen & Hill, 2001). (Contains 2 tables.) [For related report, "Eight Scenarios Illustrating the Adolescent Literacy Walk-Through for Principals," see ED521605.]

Snipes, J. & Horwitz, A. (2008). *Advancing adolescent literacy in urban schools: Research Brief*. Council of the Great City Schools. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=WS505338>

**Abstract/Summary:** The lack of sufficient literacy skills is a major factor contributing to poor performance in high school and post-secondary education. Many students, particularly those in urban schools, lack the foundational literacy skills necessary to read and comprehend the academic texts appropriate for high school and beyond. This brief provides a synthesis of the research on adolescent literacy, primarily focusing on policies and practices that can support the development of language skills necessary to access high school content. Authors advocate for leaders in urban education to make academic literacy a fundamental priority in the late elementary and secondary grades, setting explicit, measurable goals for progress in the

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vocabulary and comprehension skills required to engage academic texts. The report concludes that improving student literacy in urban districts will also require a significant investment of resources to mount interventions and support research on effective strategies, at federal, state and local levels. (Contains 76 notes.)

Torgesen, J., Houston, D., & Rissman, L. (2007). *Improving literacy instruction in middle and high schools: A guide for principals*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction.

**Abstract/Summary:** This "quick start" guide for principals of both middle and high schools from the Center on Instruction identifies three goals for secondary school literacy initiatives and provides elements of instruction required to meet these goals.

## Referrals

### Organizations:

- National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP): <http://www.nassp.org/>
- All About Adolescent Literacy: <http://www.adlit.org>
- The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk: <http://www.meadowscenter.org>
- Adolescent Literacy Collaboratory at Brown:  
[http://www.alliance.brown.edu/collaboratory/collab\\_admin.php](http://www.alliance.brown.edu/collaboratory/collab_admin.php)
- Florida Center for Reading Research: <http://www.fcrr.org>
- Council of Chief State School Officers:  
[http://www.ccsso.org/resources/digital\\_resources/adolescent\\_literacy\\_toolkit.html](http://www.ccsso.org/resources/digital_resources/adolescent_literacy_toolkit.html)

### Federally Funded Resources:

- Institute of Education Sciences (IES), public search engine available at:  
<http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/>
- What Works Clearinghouse: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

### Disclaimer:

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