

How *Jamestown Reading Navigator*[™]
Supports Research-Based Instruction
for Struggling Adolescent Readers

Support for Infrastructure Improvements

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About This Paper

This paper presents research-supported best practices related to instruction of struggling adolescent readers—that is, students in grades 6–12 who are reading at least two levels below grade level—and describes how *Jamestown Reading Navigator*[™] supports those practices.

What Is *Jamestown Reading Navigator*?

Jamestown Reading Navigator is a reading intervention program designed specifically for students in grades 6–12 who are reading two or more reading levels below their grade in school. The program provides direct, explicit instruction and modeling of good reading practices, together with opportunities for students to practice and apply these reading strategies.

Jamestown Reading Navigator combines online activities featuring interactive multimedia for students to complete; engaging and appropriate online and print texts for students to read; an audio component for further guided or independent study; student writing in response to reading; student recording of fluency passages; an assessment program to monitor students' progress; an independent measure of progress monitoring; and teacher support materials, including professional development, lesson plans, instructional recommendations, and reteaching skills support. Major areas of focus for *Jamestown Reading Navigator* include

- Comprehension skills and strategies, designed for application to content-area reading
- Vocabulary
- Writing
- Fluency
- Decoding/phonics (for students with a particular need in this area)

The *Jamestown Reading Navigator* Learner Management System helps teachers manage individual student learning and provides ongoing, up-to-the-minute information on how students are performing. Online professional development modules and on-site professional development sessions offered by Jamestown Education help educators—teachers, administrators, literacy specialists, and others—learn how to implement *Jamestown Reading Navigator* more effectively. These sessions also provide information and suggestions to help educators develop effective strategies for working with struggling adolescent readers.

Jamestown Reading Navigator has been developed based on the most up-to-date research and expert thinking in adolescent literacy, drawing on more than 30 years of experience in reaching adolescent readers with the popular Jamestown Education print series. This paper describes the match between *Jamestown Reading Navigator* and the best available instructional thinking in a variety of specific areas that are important to the success of struggling adolescent readers, as described below.

Introduction

A Critical Need to Support Struggling Adolescent Readers

Problems with literacy have serious and long-lasting consequences. A lack of literacy skills is “one of the most commonly cited reasons” for students to drop out of school (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 7). A resource guide on adolescent literacy prepared for the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory described the problem as follows:

For secondary-level students . . . the social and economic consequences of not reading well can be cumulative and profound: the failure to attain a high school diploma, a barrier to higher education, underemployment or unemployment, and difficulty in managing personal and family life. Years of failing at what is deemed a hallmark of intelligence and worth can also leave struggling readers with emotional consequences, such as anxiety and low self-esteem, that affect personality and interpersonal relationships. These effects within and beyond the classroom walls show that by the secondary grades educators can no longer defer solutions to future development or instruction. (Peterson et al., 2000, p. 6)¹

¹ Peterson et al. (2000) is laid out in a paginated PDF format, but the format does not include page numbers. Page references for quotes from Peterson et al. (2000) that are given in this paper have therefore been calculated on the basis of page numbers shown in the document table of contents.

Numerous sources attest to the scope of the challenge. *Reading Next* cited both results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the opinions of experts in adolescent literacy that “as many as 70 percent of students struggle with reading in some manner” that requires instruction differentiated for their specific needs (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 8, citing Loomis & Bourque, 2001; NCES, 1999, 2006; Olson, 2006).

Adolescents struggle with literacy for a variety of reasons. For some, English may not be their first language. Others may have mild learning disabilities. In many cases, students may simply lack experience and skill with reading. Unfortunately, difficulties in reading don’t cure themselves, but instead tend to get worse as students get older—a phenomenon reading experts refer to as the “Matthew Effect” (Stanovich, 1986). These students need literacy instruction that addresses the specific challenges they face, using the best available research-based methods and principles, in order to improve their chances of succeeding both during school and afterward.

The State of Research on Struggling Adolescent Readers

Over the last two decades, attempts to improve student literacy on the national level have focused largely on elementary instruction, and particularly on early literacy—that is, literacy at the primary grades. For example, the focus of the Reading First initiative was on improving literacy at the primary levels. Recently, however, a number of efforts—including research summaries for a variety of sources, publication of the *Reading Next* report and other documents from the Alliance for Excellent Education, and position statements from organizations such as the National Reading Conference and the International Reading Association—have helped create a higher profile for instructional issues related to adolescent readers, and particularly the large proportion of adolescents who struggle with reading.

Initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act have raised expectations for instruction. Instruction is expected to be backed with solid research that concludes it is likely to result in the desired impact on student learning. Unfortunately, research on what constitutes effective literacy instruction for adolescents is still limited. According to the editors of a volume intended to “compile from the best researchers in the field a summary and synthesis of adolescent literacy research and practice,”

As of 2003, there is not a body of research to tell us appropriate interventions that will help struggling middle and secondary school readers who can barely read. As of 2003, we still do not have a body of research to provide us with appropriate interventions to help high school readers who can read fluently but remain 3 or 4 years below grade level in reading. (Jetton & Dole, 2004, p. 6)

Although research on what constitutes effective literacy instruction for adolescents is limited in significant ways, there is substantial support in research and expert opinion for a variety of specific instructional recommendations. The state of knowledge with regard to effective instruction for struggling adolescent readers fits the description of *best available evidence* as characterized by U.S. Department of Education Assistant Secretary Grover J. Whitehurst: that is, “the integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction” (Whitehurst, 2002).

The Reading Next Report

A critical milestone in recent efforts to highlight the challenges related to adolescent literacy was the publication of *Reading Next*, a report to Carnegie Corporation of New York focusing on the needs of adolescent readers (defined in the report as those in grades 4–12), with a special emphasis on the needs of struggling readers. Preparation of this report included the following steps.

- A panel of five nationally known and respected educational researchers was convened in spring 2004, together with representatives of Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Alliance for Excellent Education.
- These panelists drew up a set of recommendations for how to meet the needs of struggling readers, including 15 specific elements of effective adolescent literacy programs that had “a substantial base in research and/or professional opinion” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 12). These included both elements with an instructional focus and recommended infrastructure elements to improve adolescent literacy.

- The resulting paper was reviewed and augmented at the 2004 meeting of the Adolescent Literacy Funders Forum (ALFF).
- An Appendix was compiled of literature supporting each of the report’s main recommendations.
- In 2006, a second edition of the report was published.

The *Reading Next* recommendations thus represented a synthesis of research-informed expert opinion that serves as an important touchstone for much of what is known about effective adolescent literacy instruction. Several caveats, however, are in order with regard to using the recommendations as a yardstick for measuring instructional programs in general, and *Jamestown Reading Navigator* in particular.

- While all 15 elements identified by *Reading Next* are characterized as having “a substantial base in research and/or professional opinion” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 12), the report nonetheless cautions that “the optimal mix of these factors has yet to be determined. . . . Nor does the remediation of adolescent literacy difficulties involve indiscriminately layering on all fifteen key elements. Choices should be matched to school and student needs” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 29). The expectation is not that each literacy program should necessarily include all 15 elements, but that developers and adopters of such programs should select those elements that seem best matched to their specific circumstances.
- The focus of *Reading Next* is explicitly on “the large population of struggling students who already decode accurately but still struggle with reading and writing after third grade” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 11). The report thus does not include recommendations related to areas such as decoding and fluency that may be important for readers who are struggling at a more basic level.
- Several of the elements of *Reading Next* relate to how infrastructure impacts adolescent literacy learning. The most that any purchased instructional program can do in these areas is to provide support to schools and districts as they implement these elements.

Development of This Paper

Development of this research-based white paper included the following steps.

- A top-level review of *Reading Next* was conducted to identify claims and recommended practices, including both those that are associated with the 15 key elements of adolescent literacy identified in the report and those that appear elsewhere in the report. As part of this review, information was collected about the sources in the Appendix to *Reading Next*, which listed literature supporting each of the 15 key elements.
- Well-known experts in the field of adolescent literacy were consulted to identify key, current, and reputable sources related to instruction for struggling adolescent readers. These included both experts who had been consulted during the development of *Jamestown Reading Navigator* and an independent expert not previously associated with the program.²
- Key documents were identified for review, with priority given to two types of documents:
 - *Broad policy-oriented research reviews and surveys of expert opinion, developed by reputable institutions and authors, with a goal of identifying key elements in effective adolescent literacy programs*
 - *More focused research syntheses and meta-analyses from reputable sources, describing the state of research and/or theory related to a specific relevant topic in adolescent literacy (e.g., comprehension, writing, formative assessment)*

2 Key contributors included Dr. Thomas W. Bean, professor in literacy/reading and coordinator of doctoral studies in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Nevada at Las Vegas; Dr. William G. Brozo, professor of literacy, Graduate School of Education, George Mason University; and Dr. Douglas Fisher, professor of language and literacy education, San Diego State University. Drs. Brozo and Fisher had previously consulted with the development team for *Jamestown Reading Navigator*. These experts provided input into interpretation of the research literature, as well as recommendations of sources to review, but are not responsible for writing the summaries of the literature or for developing the correlations of the instructional recommendations to *Jamestown Reading Navigator*.

In addition to these two types of documents, some specific research reports were also identified for review, in the case of studies that were particularly germane to topics under investigation.

- Sources were reviewed and summarized, with special reference to
 - *Specific instructional recommendations*
 - *The nature of the evidence supporting each recommendation*
- Instructional recommendations were consolidated from multiple sources.
- Cross-comparison of the research-based recommendations and *Jamestown Reading Navigator* verified that *Jamestown Reading Navigator* supports each research-based recommendation listed in this paper.

In the final paper as presented here, each section spells out specific instructional recommendations that are supported by a mix of research and expert opinion. A table then provides information on how *Jamestown Reading Navigator* aligns with each recommendation.

Key policy-oriented documents and research syntheses that were reviewed for this paper are listed in the References section of the complete White Paper.

SUPPORT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

“Improving instruction, whether done by an entire school or a single teacher, can have dramatic effects on student achievement. However, improving school infrastructure to better support literacy teachers and students *in addition to instructional improvement* will reap the biggest rewards.”—*Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 13; emphasis in original)

How Can Changes to Infrastructure Improve Instruction for Struggling Adolescent Readers?

In addition to elements related specifically to the design of instruction, *Reading Next* also includes recommendations related to specific features of the larger school infrastructure that can have a positive impact on student literacy learning. Elements related to infrastructure that are not addressed in other sections of this paper include

- Extended time for literacy
- Teacher teams
- Leadership
- A comprehensive and coordinated literacy program

Direct responsibility for infrastructure rests with the local school, district, and/or literacy program. However, *Jamestown Reading Navigator* includes features and professional development offerings that can help support improvements in these areas.

Instructional Recommendations

Extended Time for Literacy

- **Two to four hours of literacy instruction daily.** “The [*Reading Next*] panel strongly argued the need for two to four hours of literacy-connected learning daily. This time is to be spent with texts and a focus on reading and writing effectively. Although some of this time should be spent with a language arts teacher, instruction in science, history, and other subject areas qualifies as fulfilling the requirements of this element if the instruction is text centered and informed by instructional principles designed to convey content and also to practice and improve literacy skills” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 20).

Along similar lines:

- Fisher and Ivey (2006) argued, “[W]e have strong evidence to suggest that time spent reading separates good readers from poor readers (Allington, 2001). If we want low-achieving readers to become more like successful readers, any intervention ought to include many opportunities for students to actually read. In fact, it should be the focal point of the instructional time. . . . Furthermore, the amount of time students spend reading and writing (and here we mean engaged in reading and writing) ought to substantially outweigh the amount of time students spend considering skills and strategies related to literacy” (p. 184).
- Allington (2006) cited several bodies of research on the value of increased reading time for students and recommended “a minimum goal” of one and a half hours of daily reading in school (p. 44) and 30 to 45 minutes of daily writing (p. 52).
- The International Reading Association’s Commission on Adolescent Literacy noted, “Time spent reading is associated with reading success [and] tied to knowledge of the world. . . . Adolescents deserve specific opportunities to schedule reading into their days” (Moore et al., 1999, p. 5).
- **Reading and writing in the content areas.** According to the *Reading Next* report, “To leverage time for increased interaction with texts across subject areas, teachers will need to reconceptualize their understanding of what it means to teach in a subject area. In other words, teachers need to realize they are not just teaching content knowledge but also ways of reading and writing specific to a subject area” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 20).
 - Similarly, the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE, 2006) Study Group on Middle and High School Literacy recommended “[i]nstituting strategy instruction for effective reading and writing across curriculum, not just in language arts or English classes” as a way of providing increased literacy learning time (p. 35).

Teacher Teams

- **Organization into teacher teams.** “This element [of the *Reading Next* report] ensures that the school structure supports coordinated instruction and planning in an interdisciplinary teacher team. This vision centers on teachers meeting regularly to discuss students they have in common and to align instruction. . . . Teacher teams are viewed as helpful for reestablishing coordinated instruction in higher grades and as a way to promote teacher collegiality and heighten the likelihood that no child will slip through the cracks. Teacher teams that meet regularly allow teachers to plan for consistency in instruction across subject areas, which is an important step toward a comprehensive and coordinated literacy program” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 21).
 - The NASBE (2006) report made a similar recommendation: “District and school plans should promote coordinated instruction as well as planning through interdisciplinary literacy teams. Literacy teams need to include the principal, reading specialist and related personnel, and representatives from all departments. This affords consistency of instruction across subject areas and a sense of collective responsibility and efficacy for developing students’ advanced literacy skills. It serves as a mechanism for identifying individual student needs, designing coordinated supports across discrete subjects, and providing teachers help in applying research-based strategies to their discipline” (p. 38).
 - Another potential value of teacher teams, according to Allington (2006), is that they can foster the kind of professional conversation that can help make teachers more effective and improve classroom instruction (pp. 147–148).

Leadership

- **Principal’s leadership role.** The authors of *Reading Next* assert: “Without a principal’s clear commitment and enthusiasm, a curricular and instructional reform has no more chance of succeeding than any other schoolwide reform. It is critical that a principal assumes the role of an instructional leader, who demonstrates commitment and participates in the school community” (p. 21). Knowledge and experience developed by the principal related to literacy “will give a principal the necessary understanding to organize and coordinate changes in a school’s literacy program. It will further give a principal the proper foundation for making the necessary decisions to alter structural elements, such as class schedules, to ensure optimal programming for student learning” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 21).

- According to the NASBE (2006) report, “There is mounting evidence that leadership is second only to teaching in its impact on student achievement” (p. 36). The report states that one of the characteristics researchers have linked to success in improving student literacy is that “[a]dministrators make literacy improvement one of their top priorities and show resolve in making tough decisions to shift resources to those areas that directly affect literacy outcomes” (p. 38).
- **Principal’s knowledge about literacy.** “[The principal’s] leadership role includes a principal building his or her own personal knowledge of how young people learn and struggle with reading and writing and how they differ in their needs”—*Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 21).
- **Principal’s involvement in professional development.** “[A] principal who takes on the role of instructional leader will attend professional development sessions organized primarily for teachers”—*Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 21).
- **Teachers as leaders.** Teachers “should assume leadership roles and spearhead curricular improvements. Teachers play a role in ensuring the success of curricular reform”—*Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 21).
 - Describing necessary conditions for improving adolescent literacy, the NASBE (2006) report similarly argued, “In addition to state and local boards of education, planning must include governors, legislatures, business organizations, professional associations, universities, and most importantly, the profession, particularly teachers” (p. 30).

Comprehensive and Coordinated Literacy Program

- **Development of a comprehensive and coordinated program.** “The [*Reading Next*] vision for an effective literacy program recognizes that creating fluent and proficient readers and writers is a very complex task and requires that teachers coordinate their instruction to reinforce important strategies and concepts. . . . An effective literacy program should implement many of the instructional elements in a consistent and coordinated way” (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, p. 22). Some of the features of a comprehensive and coordinated program, based on the description in *Reading Next*, include
 - Coordinating instruction across content areas “to reinforce important strategies and concepts” (p. 22)
 - Teachers working in teams that are responsible for specific cohorts of students
 - A cross-curriculum focus on “reinforcing reading and writing skills, such as note-taking and comprehension strategies” (p. 22)
 - Adjusting instruction in a coordinated way to meet the varying literacy needs of individual students
 - Reaching outside of school to collaborate with out-of-school organizations and the local community

The importance of a comprehensive and coordinated literacy program is attested in other sources as well. For example:

- Describing preconditions for effective adolescent literacy intervention programs, Fisher and Ivey (2006) stated, “[W]e assume that the entire school is focused on literacy achievement and that teachers use content literacy approaches to ensure that their students are engaged in meaningful curriculum. By this, we mean that the history, science, math, English, art, music, and other teachers ensure that students are developing strategic reading skills as they read for information. . . . Without [this nonnegotiable feature] of the learning environment . . . it is doubtful that a specific, limited intervention will make much of a difference” (p. 181, citing Fisher & Frey, 2004; Ivey, 2004; Ivey & Fisher, 2006).
- According to Allington (2006), “the best evidence available indicates that addressing the needs of struggling readers requires a comprehensive and sustained intervention effort” (p. 141, citing Allington, 2002b).

- The NASBE (2006) report urged that “State policies should build district capacity to help teachers and leaders work collaboratively to pursue viable solutions to advance the literacy levels of adolescent learners. It begins with designing coherent district and school literacy plans that can provide teachers and school leaders with the tools, resources, and training to provide literacy instruction within content-area teaching. Districts and schools should design comprehensive programs and supports based on detailed information on students’ needs” (p. 6).

How Jamestown Reading Navigator Can Help Support Infrastructure Improvements

The following table describes how *Jamestown Reading Navigator* can help support the infrastructure improvements described above.

Summary of Infrastructure Recommendations	Application Through <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i>
Students should experience two to four hours of literacy-connected learning daily.	<p><i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> accommodates instruction blocks of 45 to 90 minutes in a variety of educational settings, offering flexible options for how much time each day students will work in the program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a rule of thumb, each journey (lesson) in <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> is estimated to require approximately two 45-minute periods to complete, although actual time requirements may vary widely from classroom to classroom. • Each trek (level) in <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> includes at least 16 journeys: 26 for Trek 1, 32 each for Trek 2 and Trek 3, and 16 for Trek 4. • This estimate of time spent in <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> is in addition to time spent in literacy-related activities in English/language arts and other content-area courses.
Teachers across content areas should refocus their teaching to include ways of reading and writing in the content area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> offers an on-site professional development session for content-area teachers, titled Using Reading as a Process for Content-Area Instruction. The session focuses on helping content-area teachers learn strategies for presenting subject-area texts so that their students use reading as a tool for learning and mastering content-area standards. • The online professional development modules on oral reading fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing include information that is appropriate for helping content-area teachers incorporate effective literacy practices into their instruction.
Teachers should be organized into interdisciplinary teams to coordinate instruction.	<p><i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> offers on-site professional development sessions that focus on building an interdisciplinary school literacy community. These sessions are designed to include <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> teachers, content-area teachers, support staff, and administrators, with a focus on developing or revising a school literacy plan.</p>
The principal should assume a leadership role in the school’s literacy program.	<p><i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> offers on-site professional development sessions focusing on administrator training, which helps provide principals and other administrators with the tools they need to act as leaders in school literacy. Topics covered in these sessions typically include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining fidelity to the <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> implementation to achieve learning gains • Evaluating classrooms and teachers that are using <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> • Accessing and using administrative-level reports to meet accountability standards • Instituting literacy change in the school community to raise student achievement
The principal should be knowledgeable about adolescent literacy.	<p>Professional development offered through <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> provides opportunities for school administrators to become more informed on adolescent literacy issues and instructional methods.</p>

Summary of Infrastructure Recommendations	Application Through <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i>
The principal should attend professional development sessions organized for teachers.	Administrators are encouraged to attend the general-focus on-site <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> professional development sessions that are designed for teachers, and to do so often.
Teachers should function as leaders in literacy efforts.	<i>Jamestown Reading Navigator's</i> on-site professional development offerings provide training for both teachers and administrators on building a school literacy community and carrying out planning, implementation, and administrative functions (as appropriate) in connection with <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> .
Schools should develop a comprehensive and coordinated literacy program.	<i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> offers on-site professional development sessions that focus on building a school literacy community. These sessions provide opportunities for schools to develop or revise a school literacy plan that incorporates <i>Jamestown Reading Navigator</i> , regular language/literacy courses, content-area instruction, and other school resources.

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