Strategic Plan Update Report

DATE: February 11, 2020

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Strategic Plan Update: Literacy

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RESOURCE

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ISSUE

The purpose of this Strategic Plan Update report is to provide the Board of Trustees with an overview of the data, strategies and initiatives used in support of literacy learning, highlighting the collaborative efforts of the Instructional Supports units as they work with schools in support of high quality teaching and learning in the area of literacy.

BACKGROUND

In 2018, Edmonton Public Schools formally reaffirmed the District Strategic Plan for the 2018-2022 term. The District Strategic Plan has three priority areas with supporting goals and outcomes. The plan provides common direction and alignment between the work of the Board of Trustees, the Superintendent of Schools and District staff. The plan serves as the foundation for a District culture of evidence-based decision-making, assurance and accountability.

To demonstrate the District's commitment to transparency and accountability, Strategic Plan Update reports were introduced in 2016–2017 as an extension of the Annual Education Results Report (AERR). The reports are intended to provide the Board of Trustees with detailed progress towards the goals and outcomes of our Strategic Plan.

CURRENT SITUATION

This Strategic Plan Update report reflects the work in support of high quality teaching and learning of literacy and is in direct response to Priority 1 Goal 2 of the 2018-2022 District Strategic Plan, P1 G2: More students demonstrate growth and achieve student learning outcomes with a specific focus on literacy and numeracy.

KEY POINTS

This Strategic Plan Update report provides the Board of Trustees with an overview of the work in support of literacy learning, highlighting the collaborative efforts of the Instructional Supports units as they work with schools in support of high quality teaching and learning in the area of literacy.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Strategic Plan Update: Literacy

NP:mh



Strategic Plan Update:

Literacy

February 11, 2020



INTRODUCTION

This Strategic Plan Update Report provides the Board of Trustees with an overview of Division efforts in support of literacy. Priority 1 of the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan calls for the Division to, "foster growth and success for every student by supporting their journey from early learning through high school completion and beyond". The outcome of Priority 1 Goal 2 of the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan sets the direction that, "more students [will] demonstrate growth and achieve student learning outcomes, with a specific focus on literacy and numeracy".

Investment in literacy can reduce costs in:

- Social assistance
- Healthcare
- Justice

Frontier College, 2017

The importance of literacy cannot be overstated. Literacy has a lifelong impact on individuals, as lower levels of literacy have consequences at both the individual and societal level. For individuals, lower literacy skills are

associated with poverty, employment instability and dissatisfaction, and poorer health outcomes. For the broader society, low literacy levels within a population can have both an economic and civic impact on the community. In Canada, approximately 40 per cent of working aged

A 1% rise in literacy rates can lead to a 3% rise in GDP.

Schwerdt, 2018

adults do not meet minimum literacy standards, and increasingly jobs require at least this standard. (Canada West, 2018).

Alberta Education defines literacy as the ability, confidence and willingness to engage with language to acquire, construct and communicate meaning in all aspects of daily living. Through Kindergarten to Grade 12, literacy is critical in helping students to make sense of the world around them and navigate their daily lives; additionally, literacy is foundational to their learning across the curriculum. With this is mind, schools and catchments, in collaboration with central units, are very intentional in the area of literacy instruction and supports.

This report takes a look at Division efforts in support of literacy through an overview of literacy related data sets; the strategies and interventions that staff of Edmonton Public Schools are using in support of high quality literacy teaching and learning; and how the work to support literacy learning is a shared responsibility across the instructional supports group of central decision units. The information in this report builds upon the Division's most recent results in literacy achievement reported on pages 20-26 of tel:the 2018-2019 Annual Education Results Report and Three-Year Education Plan.

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS FOR LITERACY SUCCESS

The group of five central decision units that come together under the umbrella of Instructional Supports to Schools is comprised of Curriculum and Resource Support (CRS), Research and Innovation for Student Learning (RISL) and the Inclusive Learning (IL) trio of Specialized Supports and Services, Diversity and Comprehensive School Health, and Early Years. The work to support schools and catchments in the provision of high quality literacy instruction weaves across and throughout the expertise of the five Instructional Supports teams. These units collaborate to support the teaching and learning of literacy in the Division from pre-Kindergarten through to Grade 12. Their work fits well within the pyramid of intervention, which outlines a comprehensive system of instructional strategies and interventions that can be delivered in response to the needs of Division students:



- Tier 1-Universal Strategies: a range of universal instructional strategies and classroom supports that help all students advance in their literacy development.
- Tier 2-Targeted Strategies: intentional, targeted supports
 provided by the classroom teacher that are more specific to
 small groups or individual learners such as additional time,
 Google Read and Write, ELL support and formal reading
 interventions.
- Tier 3-Specialized Strategies: individual supports such as specialized assessments and strategies tailored to the unique literacy learning needs of an individual student.

The following is an overview of how the Instructional Supports units work with schools in support of high quality literacy teaching and learning. This work reflects the unique expertise and content area of the individual units, as well as their shared responsibility and collaboration towards supporting quality literacy instruction across the Division.

EARLY YEARS

There is a large body of research that speaks to the importance of children's exposure to literacy prior to the start of their formal education (National Center for Family Literacy, 2008); and while some children begin school already well on their way as readers and writers, others arrive in school requiring more immersion in language-rich environments to catch up to their peers. Alberta Health's Early Development Indicator (EDI) data indicates that children in Edmonton are more vulnerable to not meeting age-appropriate developmental outcomes compared to children across the province. This reinforces the importance of early intervention programming for children. The Division offers Pre-Kindergarten and full- and half-day Kindergarten to prepare children for entering Grade 1. These early years programs intentionally provide a language-rich classroom environment using a play-based approach to learning.

In the early years, oral language development is considered to be the foundation to the development of emergent literacy skills. Developing the skills and knowledge of listening and speaking, which have a strong relationship to reading comprehension and to writing, is foundational to the development of literacy skills.

Early interventions for children whose oral language is not developing appropriately is important for leveling the playing field. The October 2019 Strategic Plan Update Report: Early Years presented data on the effect of early interventions for children with speech delays. As well, in Kindergarten, teachers use the Early Years Evaluation - Teacher Assessment (EYE-TA) tool to assist in identifying children who might be at risk for literacy delays, enabling the intentional early application of interventions and programming to address developmental delays or gaps.

Effect of Early Interventions on Children with Speech Delays

- 26% no longer required specialized support
- 20% who began with severe delays (Tier 3) now only need mild to moderate support (Tiers 1 and 2)

Strategic Plan Update Report: Early Years, October 2019

All children attending Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten benefit from early identification and differentiated instruction in a language-rich environment as part of Tier 1 literacy supports. Teachers and educational assistants are able to collaborate with speech language pathologists around programming interventions and strategies to better support children in the crucial early years as part of Tier 2 supports. Individualized support for oral language development is provided through speech language assistance within the classroom as part of Tier 3 literacy interventions.

CURRICULUM

When thinking about the continuum of literacy learning, learning to read is a lifelong process that begins at home. Kindergarten lays an initial foundation to literacy learning, and in Grades 1-3 the focus on learning how to read builds fundamental skills to becoming literate. Areas identified as being specifically important to reading development include:

- Phonemic awareness discriminating individual sounds in words
- Phonics linking letters and sounds
- Comprehension making sense of text
- Vocabulary knowing what the words mean
- Writing composing and spelling
- Fluency reading text accurately, smoothly and expressively

To assist Division teachers in their efforts to support students in the development of lifelong reading skills, the Division introduced the District-Wide Focus on Reading (DFR) in 2015-2016. The DFR reflects a valuing of teacher expertise and professional judgment, with a focus on the individual and collective success of students. It supports the building of teacher capacity for improving reading outcomes and determining student achievement relative to reading outcomes in the curriculum. Through the DFR, teachers and principals collaborate with staff from central services to further develop and implement practical and effective resources and instructional practices in reading.

Additionally, through the DFR, the Division captures whether students are reading at, above or below grade level. This data, along with results from the Highest Level of Achievement Test (HLAT) for writing and local school literacy measures, assists teachers in programming for students and identifying which students might benefit from additional supports or interventions. Data and feedback gathered through the DFR initiative helps to inform many of the literacy related initiatives occurring across the Division. These initiatives are intended to further build staff expertise and capacity in the area of literacy instruction. For the 2019-2020 school year reading at, above or below grade level reporting will include students in Grades 1 to 9.

As grades progress, the focus on reading shifts more to reading to learn; however, students continue to be supported in their reading development to ensure that they can understand more and more complex texts across subject areas.

When one thinks about literacy in relationship to the program of studies, it is typically associated with language arts; however, every subject area has its own unique literacy features, as literacy is foundational to all learning. In the Alberta curriculum, literacy is present across the subjects - language arts, science, social studies and mathematics, fine arts and health and life skills. In each of these areas, students learn how to read different kinds of text, write and express themselves in the formats associated with each subject and develop subject-specific vocabulary. Core to the concept of literacy being presented across all subjects is the idea that every teacher teaches and supports literacy regardless of their subject specialization. The following table provides examples of what literacy learning looks like across the Alberta curriculum:

Subject	Literacy Learning
Language Arts	communicate feelings evoked by a story using a media or mode such as dance, art, or video; create rhyme in a song or poem; and adjust oral and written communication according to audience
Mathematics	understand math-specific vocabulary and recognize that words can have different meanings depending on the context; explain reasoning in answering a question; and acquire information and use comprehension strategies to solve a mathematical problem
Social Studies	prepare and participate in a debate on a current event; write to the mayor about the need for a new playground in their community; and interpret a political cartoon

Science	engage in research based on brainstormed ideas and questions on a specific topic; read and interpret the periodic table; and record daily weather in journals using text and illustrations
Fine Arts	express ideas, emotions and understanding through movement, music, dramatic play or visual representation; read a musical score; and write and produce a play
Health, Life Skills and CALM	describe how social messages and stereotypes can affect feelings of self-worth; set and modify written goals to improve personal wellness; and research and explain the skills, attitudes and behaviours for building, maintaining and enhancing healthy, positive relationships

The work of CRS assists teachers across all of these subject areas to incorporate the teaching of literacy into their practice. Examples of this support include:

- Provision of consultant support to teachers and school leaders
- Development of the Reading Changes Lives informational toolkit
- Development of a video series on building vocabulary proficiency in math
- Development of online learning modules focused on literacy
- Provision of professional learning sessions focused on literacy

Significant work has also been done around supporting the identification of literacy print materials and resources to help ensure that school collections reflect the students of the school community. A great example of this work is the Literacy Toolkit. Developed by the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Team, the Literacy Toolkit is a K-6 resource that focuses on literature with Indigenous voices and Canadian content. The kit includes culturally relevant resources that are leveled (organized by level of difficulty) to support literacy instruction for Division 1 and 2 teachers. All books located within the kit are leveled and can be used as a resource to support curriculum delivery or as part of an intervention program.

INTERVENTIONS

The Division provides a range of formal and informal literacy interventions to students not yet reading or writing at grade level. Formal literacy interventions include: Reading Recovery (RR), Leveled Literacy (LLI), Middle Years Literacy (MYLI), Adapted Literacy Intervention (ALI), and High School Literacy Intervention (HSLI). Literacy leadership capacity is further developed by the teachers receiving training in these formal interventions. Feedback from intervention training indicates that after receiving training, teachers develop a self-perception of increased efficacy in their teaching and their ability to support their fellow teachers in their teaching of literacy. Teachers trained in literacy interventions work with students one-on-one or in small groups towards meeting grade-level expectations.

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery (RR) is an early literacy intervention program for the lowest achieving Grade 1 students who need one-to-one teaching to get reading and writing underway. It is designed to prevent literacy failure and close the student achievement gap, bringing students to average levels of classroom performance in reading and writing in 12-20 weeks. Reading Recovery teachers work individually with students, providing daily 30-minute sessions. Reading Recovery is a resource-intensive intervention that many schools find challenging to maintain in their budgets; however, the high quality professional learning teachers receive through RR builds strong literacy leadership within the school community and teachers are able to apply RR practices into their work with all students.

Reading Recovery	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16
Number of students formally supported through RR across the Division	62	62	66	52
Accelerated or substantial growth (%)	72%	73.5%	76%	72%
Limited growth (%)	28%	26.5%	24%	29%

Data triangulation between the results of the DFR (reading) and HLAT (writing) for students who participated in the RR program indicate that it has a significant positive impact. For 2018-2019:

- 71 per cent of students who completed RR were able to write at grade level at the end of the school year
- 71 per cent of students who completed RR were reading at or above grade level

Grades 2 and 3 students who completed RR in Grade 1 and did not change schools were tracked in 2017-2018.

- 81 per cent of those who had made accelerated or substantial progress in RR were determined to be at or above grade level in reading
- 67 per cent were writing at an adequate or proficient level

Research indicates that teachers trained in RR transfer the skills that they acquire into how they teach all of their students. They develop a deep understanding of literacy instruction and apply this understanding using their professional judgement in their classrooms (Stouffer, 2015). Thus even if a school no longer offers a formal RR program, the skills and knowledge a teacher gained through RR training continue to be used in the classroom to support literacy programming.

Leveled Literacy and Middle Years Literacy

Leveled Literacy (LLI) is targeted to support below-grade readers in Grades 1-9. It is designed to be administered individually or in groups of two or three students for 30-45 minutes, five times a week to accelerate reading growth over a 12-20 week period. Teachers receive targeted LLI training and lessons are based on Fountas and Pinnell's Leveled Literacy Intervention resources.

Levelled Literacy Intervention (Grades 1-9)	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15
Number of students supported by LLI across the Division	1,067	935	722	561	511
Average reading growth (months)	7.7	6.7	7.0	6.4	6.7
Average number of lessons	44	41	43	48	49
Extrapolated reading growth in 4 months of interventions (months)	8.0	7.0	7.2	6.8	6.7

Middle Years Literacy Intervention (MYLI) is designed to assist students in Grades 3-9 who are at-risk in their literacy learning. Ideally, it is designed to work for individuals or groups of two to three students, who meet three to five times a week for 30-45 minutes. Targeted support is provided during each lesson based on an initial assessment and ongoing monitoring intended to accelerate each student's literacy progress.

Middle Years Literacy Intervention (Grades 3-9)	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15
Number of students supported by MYLI across the Division	114	101	61	98	110
Average reading growth (months)	13.0	8.0	9.0	11.0	13.0
Average number of lessons	46	38	63	48	47
Extrapolated reading growth in 4 months of intervention (months)	11.0	9.8	7.0 ¹	10.8	12.2

While there is a recommended number of weekly lessons for both LLI and MYLI, student absences, school events, and teacher scheduling can all play a factor in meeting this goal. The Division's data does indicate that receiving more lessons per week has a positive impact on reading growth.

In comparing the extrapolated reading growth at four months for LLI and MYLI it should be noted that the difference in grade range likely impacts final cohort results, as extrapolated LLI results for Grade 3 and above are similar to MYLI results. Students in Grade 1 reflect a wider age-appropriate developmental range and are acclimatizing to a full day of school. Typically, schools do not begin any kind of formal reading intervention until after the winter break, when the students are more settled and a bit older. Altogether, the average growth experienced by students is usually at least twice what is expected in a regular classroom, indicating the efficacy of these interventions. More detailed cumulative results for LLI and MYLI are available in Appendix A.

Adapted Literacy Intervention and High School Literacy Intervention

Adapted Literacy Intervention (ALI) is a small group (one to three students) intervention in French Immersion and Bilingual programs designed to support the lowest achieving students in Grades 1-9 in the target language. It is intended to be undertaken daily for approximately 12-20 weeks to bring students closer to achieving grade-level in the target language for both reading and writing. Students in Grades 1-3 receive 30 minutes of daily instruction, while students in Grades 4-9 receive 45 minutes. Typically, only a small number of students receive this intervention (less than 10); this is reflective of the lower number of children participating in language programming compared to the Division's overall student enrolment.

High School Literacy Intervention (HSLI) is designed for teachers of all disciplines in Grades 10-12 to increase their knowledge about strategies to enrich student learning by deepening students' comprehension of texts, increasing vocabulary knowledge, and enhance writing. It is intended for struggling readers and writers to accelerate learning, is short term, and occurs in small group instruction based on assessments and students' competencies. As part of this work around literacy interventions, high schools are exploring Literacy Foundations and literacy strategies across the subject areas. There is currently no data for this intervention as the Division is working towards formalising HSLI so that it more closely resembles RR, LLI and MYLI.

SPECIALIZED SUPPORTS

Recognizing the diversity of students served across the Division, and their wide range of literacy learning needs, the Division offers a variety of specialized literacy strategies and interventions to support meeting the literacy learning needs of all students.

¹ The lower 2017-16 results for MYLI were in part likely due to the application of the intervention to more students in Grades 1 and 2 compared to the other years, as MYLI is intended for Grades 3 and up.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

As the number of English language learner (ELL) students has grown to approximately 25 per cent of the Division's overall student population, there has been a significant increase in the number of students participating in ESL programming, particularly at the high school level. The work to support literacy learning for our ELL students must reflect the added complexity of developing literacy skills as well as supporting students in their fluency in the English. To support staff working with our ELL students, the Division brought in Dr. Diane Staer Fenner as a professional learning opportunity to build teaching and leadership capacity in this area. Dr. Fenner is an expert in ESL instruction and assessment and the author of several books on teaching ELL learners, building teacher capacity for ESL and advocating for ELL students. As part of the capacity building, junior high schools were provided with a copy of Dr. Fenner's book *Unlocking English Learners' Potential: Strategies for Making Content Accessible*.

Using Dr. Fenner's work with ELL learners as a guide, the Division is updating its ESL guiding document. Key points include:

- The importance of using a strengths-based approach rather than focusing on deficits
- The need to teach language and content together
- The importance of collaboration between staff
- The importance of educators as advocates for their students

Across all divisions, multicultural representation is encouraged along with a focus on oral academic language and vocabulary development. This approach is supported by recently completed research at the University of Alberta and the University of British Columbia, which recommended that support for ELL students should focus on both oral language and literacy as the former strongly predicted reading comprehension outcomes (Paradis, 2019).

Individual Supports

In schools there is significant teacher capacity to assess student reading levels to inform programming and intervention strategies. However, when a student's reading growth is not improving, schools are able to access the support of Division reading specialists. These professionals are available to further assess students and diagnose learning disabilities, offer programming recommendations and debrief with families, teachers and schools.

Some students require even more individualized support; for learners with significant developmental disabilities, the Division offers an emergent literacy approach. There exists a long-standing emergent literacy community of practice, and emergent literacy professional learning is robustly attended. Many of the Inclusive Learning consultants have considerable training in emergent literacy and are available to consult with teachers beyond the professional learning sessions. Emergent Literacy is premised on the belief that all students are competent and can learn. Programming through an emergent literacy approach includes the following strategies and interventions:

- Sharing reading
- Predictable chart writing
- Alphabet and phonological awareness
- Independent writing and reading
- Symbol-based communication

Another area of support for the Division's diverse learners is through the augmentative and alternative communication program, which can begin as early as pre-Kindergarten and supports children with no to limited verbal expressive communication skills. Along with support from specialized teams including speech language pathologists, children who qualify are provided access to technology that helps them communicate, develop language and become literate.

BUILDING STAFF CAPACITY

A critical component of the Division's literacy teaching and learning work is supporting the ongoing growth and capacity of staff. The Instructional Supports units develop literacy centered professional learning (PL) for teaching staff from pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12. This PL is responsive to demand and is available throughout the year and in Summer Institutes. Examples of literacy related professional learning include, and are not limited to the following:

- Literacy Foundations for Kindergarten Grade 12
- Building on Foundations for Reading and Writing
- Reading and Writing Workshop
- Supporting English Language Learners
- Literacy Instruction for Students with Special Needs
- Emergent Literacy for Students with Significant Disabilities and Complex Communication Needs
- Strategies for Readers Needing Support in Junior High and High Schools
- Emergent Literacy for the Early Years
- Phonological Awareness for Emergent and Early Readers
- Reading Across Content Areas
- Using Workshop Methods in the Content Areas
- Administering and Interpreting Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System
- Deepening Literacy Development Through Inquiry and Project Based Learning

Principal and literacy leaders' capacity to support teaching staff in literacy instruction is an important component of the Division's work in this area. PL available to assist these staff in building capacity includes, and is not limited to:

- Literacy Coaching: The Role of the Literacy Leader
- Leading the work of Reading and Writing Workshop
- Leading Through Quality Literacy and Numeracy Programming
- A Principal's Guide to Leadership in Reading Workshop
- District Focus on Reading Cohort

As well, every year some staff choose to deepen their understanding of literacy instruction and leadership through more formal schooling. Currently, there are nine Division staff receiving tuition support and/or professional development leave to work on a Master's or PhD in the area of literacy.

NEXT STEPS

This fall, the Division implemented the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS). The BAS is a reading inventory that can provide valuable information about individual student's strengths and areas for growth, resulting in more informed, targeted and intentional teaching practices. The data from the BAS will enable teachers to track, monitor and program more intentionally for the growth of below-grade-level readers. Additionally the data from the BAS will serve as a Division literacy data set that will provide a system's perspective to overall reading progress of students. Over the next four years, the BAS will be introduced as follows:

- 2019-2020 Grades 1-3
- 2020-2021 Grades 4-6
- 2021-2022 Grades 7-9
- 2022-2023 Grades 10-12

Literacy remains a Division priority with particular attention to how capacity is built and literacy support is organized in schools to ensure a quality literacy environment. As schools and catchments are planning for next year, they are balancing the need for efficiencies with the importance of high quality teaching and learning in the area of literacy and the impactful interventions.

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APPENDIX AADDITIONAL LLI AND MYLI DATA

Combined Leveled Literacy Intervention Results from 2017 to 2019								
	Number of Students	Average Reading Growth (months)	Average Number of Lessons Received	Average Number of Weeks	Extrapolated Growth in 16 Weeks			
Total Students	2,717	7.2	43	15	7.5			
Students who were in:								
Grade 1	366	3.5	36	13	4.3			
Grade 2	893	5.5	45	16	5.5			
Grade 3	604	8.0	45	16	7.9			
Grade 4	324	8.5	40	16	8.6			
Grade 5	261	9.2	41	15	10.0			
Grade 6	179	11.9	42	15	12.7			
Grade 7	42	16.6	44	18	14.6			
Grade 8	28	14.6	35	17	14.1			
Grade 9	16	10.9	35	17	10.3			
Students who were:								
English Language Learners	1,021	7.2	43	15	7.6			
First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students	248	7.2	42	16	7.2			
Students who had an initial readir.	Students who had an initial reading level of:							
Initial reading level Grade 1	1,831	5.6	44	16	5.7			
Initial reading level Grade 2	525	10.1	40	15	10.7			
Initial reading level Grade 3	216	11.5	40	14	12.9			
Initial reading level Grade 4	95	10.3	40	14	11.4			
Initial reading level Grade 5	43	10.7	41	14	11.9			

Combined Middle Years Literacy Intervention Results from 2015-2019							
	Number of Students	Average Reading Growth (months)	Average Number of Lessons Received	Average Number of Weeks	Extrapolated Growth in 4 months		
Total Students	465	11.2	48	17	10.6		
Students who were in:							
Grade 1	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a		
Grade 2	16	6.4	87	19	5.3		
Grade 3	47	6.5	48	15	7.1		
Grade 4	85	9.5	50	17	8.9		
Grade 5	107	10.3	52	16	10.0		
Grade 6	112	12.2	48	17	11.7		
Grade 7	48	17.0	40	19	14.0		
Grade 8	26	15.1	31	20	11.9		
Grade 9	23	14.2	30	16	14.4		
Students who were:							
English Language Learners	53	10.5	49	16	10.3		
First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students	71	11.2	43	17	10.6		
Students who had an initial reading	ng level of:						
Initial reading level Grade 1	88	6.6	58	17	6.2		
Initial reading level Grade 2	159	11.6	48	16	11.3		
Initial reading level Grade 3	106	13.3	51	19	11.3		
Initial reading level Grade 4	69	11.9	40	16	11.8		
Initial reading level Grade 5	39	13.1	31	16	13.3		
Initial reading level Grade 6 or above	4	11.5	22	12	15.7		