

Academic Stop-Gap Measures

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All curriculum is designed for grade level. But unfortunately, at many of our Title I schools, the kiddos are not on grade level. So a parallel practice has to be run and what we do, we call those simple resources stop-gap programs, which eliminate the educational gap. They're designed for, starting in kindergarten, and the student essentially being ready to go, on grade level by third grade. And once you get those kiddos up at third grade, then it just flows into fourth and fifth, because now the student is on grade level and the curriculum is designed at those levels in third, fourth, and fifth grade, for grade level, they're ready to go.

There has to be essentially, three basic programs that are run: a numeracy program has to be run so that the students are up to skill base in mathematics. The easiest to fix is of course mathematics but in an elementary school the most difficult to really rectify is your literacy, your language arts. Those programs are very simply designed because so many of teachers in these urban Title I schools are entry-level teachers between first and five years, and they need to have a very simple approach to be able to be effective as if they were veteran teachers. So the programs are not complicated at all to run. We've been giving the language arts programs away across the United States, if anybody wanted to download them, or anybody who comes into Graham Elementary or who is interested in this, we just send them out *en masse* so that they can run these programs. I've added a rationale and an implementation process of the program so the fact that they can just be read and readily, ready to go for any particular campus that chooses to run them.

The numeracy program is of course is a math skills program we run just five minutes a day to make sure the kids are on level for skill, easy to do in the morning, quickly done. The literacy is about a two year process for kiddos. It's just more difficult to get up [to speed] and that's just the nature of language, it's just more metaphoric, allegorical. I could give a quick example. The word spectacle. To a child, and especially an English language learner or a student who doesn't have good home language vocabulary development, well, spectacle can be used in a variety of ways. It can be used to mean the glasses on your head or it could mean someone who made a spectacle of themselves. Or a table, you know, you can have a table you eat at, or you can table a meeting. It's just the nature of language, which is difficult for kiddos to pick up on these multiple meanings when they don't have that support at home. So what we do is we run two simple programs. One is a non-negotiables writing program, which is 800 of the most commonly used words in the English language, and the kids will just run through that, 25 a week, on how to spell those words correctly, that you don't see as problems in medium and high SES schools, because they [students] come to schools with those particular skills. But they're essential skills for them to have.

The other is a fluency program that [uses] the same words, except we added two hundred words, for a thousand of the most common words, and the students run through those and they're developmentally based, from kindergarten to sixth grade, and those particular aspects. It's a whole language program that we run with the kiddos, and then we run a very structured phonics program. So the kiddos get a non-negotiable memorization of whole language words that are very important to know. In addition, they're able to learn a very structured phonics process [so] that they can then sound out words as they move on along through the school of words that have meanings in which they just need to know sounds, and then eventually of course, those words would fall into non-negotiable words as they go on through their education years. But what's interesting is that we're finding that middle schools are implementing the same non-negotiables and fluency programs just because so many kiddos are coming out of the elementary years with those lack of academic skill base, so the fact is, they're running those as parallel programs in both the charter schools and the public schools that are interested in running these programs. And of course, the price is right, which is free.

If the programs are run, so simply run, that any teacher of any level of experience can run them, that promotes high levels of success because all of a sudden you're not limited by having experienced personnel only being successful with kiddos that come to school with certain levels of academic disadvantages that can be readily rectified.