

High School Reading Initiatives

Council Rock has made a concerted effort to improve both reading instruction and test scores at the high school level. This is the second year that Council Rock is offering a program called "READ 180" to 9th graders (and a few 10th graders) as the administration continues to use additional strategies to improve the district's PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) testing results in 11th grade.

The 9th grade Reading Remediation - Students who need reading remediation in 9th grade are offered a course called "Strategies for improving your Reading" (Strategies). The combination of "Strategies" and "English Foundations Course" is designed to help both regular education and special education students. "Strategies" and "Foundations" are both full-year, daily courses.

Approximately five percent of the 8th grade populations of each middle school were recommended to take "Strategies" in the 2010-2011 school year. All in-coming 9th graders recommended to take part in "Strategies" must have parental permission in order to be enrolled in the course. This program is unique to 9th graders at both high schools, and a few 10th graders at North. The only students who take reading courses in 10th, 11th and 12th grade are Special Education students, whose IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) requires a reading component.

"READ 180" - The intervention program employed by teachers of the "Strategies" classes is "READ 180". "READ 180" uses instructional software, high-interest literature, and direct instruction in reading skills. It is a proven, research-based intervention, and at a cost of \$60,000, Council Rock purchased a total of sixty-nine "READ 180" licenses, which can be used at either high school.

High School Reading Measurements - Although the main measurement for reading in high school is the spring PSSA exam given in 11th grade, the students in the district's "Strategies" class are continually tested for progress and monitored for improvement through the Scholastic Reading Inventory (see Middle Level Reading article for more information about the Scholastic Reading Inventory). The district shared results that demonstrate substantial growth for most of the students at Council Rock South who are in the program. Because the first Council Rock students to participate in "READ 180" are only in 10th grade this year, it will be another one and a half years before the district gets the results of their 11th grade PSSA exams.

PSSA Reading Results – The PSSA tests are the measurement Pennsylvania uses to assess if a school has met Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals under the Federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation. A 4-year tracking of 11th grade PSSA data, noted on the chart below, shows Advanced scores have gone down and Below Basic scores have gone up during this time period. The PSSA web site recognizes that Below Basic signifies "a need for additional instructional support and/or increased student commitment to achieve the Proficient Level".

	<u>11th Grade PSSA Data</u>			
	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
<u>CR Totals</u>				
Advanced	50.9%	45.5%	49.7%	46.9%
Proficient	30.9%	35.4%	30.5%	31.3%
Basic	10.5%	10.9%	11.6%	12.1%
Below Basic	7.6%	8.2%	8.2%	9.8%

CR IEP Totals

Advanced	8.9%	8.4%	11.6%	2.9%
Proficient	27.4%	30.1%	30.8%	26.8%
Basic	29%	27.3%	27.4%	26.8%
Below Basic	34.7%	34.3%	30.1%	43.5%

State Totals

Advanced	31.2%	28.6%	31.5%	32.7%
Proficient	33.9%	36.5%	33%	32.2%
Basic	16.3%	15.5%	16.4%	16.2%
Below Basic	18.5%	19.3%	19.1%	18.9%

Last year's Below Basic total was 9.8% out of almost 1,100 students. If these testing results truly reflect academic performance, the percentage would translate into over 100 students graduating this year who scored Below Basic in Reading in 11th grade.

Since neither North's nor South's Special Education IEP students met the Federal *No Child Left Behind* law's 2009 requirement that 63% of this measurable sub group score Proficient or above, both schools were put on warning for not meeting their AYP goals. Instead, 70% of Special Education IEP students are Basic (26.8%) or Below Basic (43.5%).

The chart above provides a view on four successive years of testing, each year with a different cohort of students taking the test. The chart below, however, is longitudinal, meaning it demonstrates the scores of the same group of students at two different test sittings, in 8th grade in 2005-2006 and in 11th grade in 2008-2009. The data indicates that test scores in 11th grade dropped significantly in the Advanced level and increased in the Below Basic level from these students' 8th grade results.

	% Advanced	% Proficient	% Basic	% Below Basic
2005-2006 8th grade	65.5%	22.8%	5.9%	5.8%
2008-2009 11th grade	46.9%	31.3%	12.1%	9.8%

To try and improve the overall decline in 11th grade PSSA testing, Council Rock has focused on areas that could help improve performance.

The 11th grade Testing Environment: During 11th grade PSSA testing, students report to their high school at their regularly scheduled time. This year, PSSA testing took place on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, April 13-15, when most of the senior class was on their high school senior trip. The PSSA testing took place from 7:30am to 10:30am without any other students in the school. Eleventh graders had the opportunity to eat lunch from 10:30 to 11:00 before joining all other high school students in grades 9, 10 and 12 (if they are not on the senior trip), who did not report to school until 11:05. All the students then had an abbreviated class schedule for the remainder of the day.

Benchmark Critical Reading Test: Peggy Walsh stated, "This year the high school instituted benchmark critical reading tests for 9th, 10th, and 11th grades." The tests, which are administered three times a year in 9th and 10th grades and twice a year in 11th grade, are an attempt to keep students familiar with the format of PSSA questions. Students have a two-year gap in taking PSSA tests; no formal testing is done in 9th and 10th grades. The test data from these

benchmarks is available on performance tracker (the computer program the district uses to keep track of student grades) and serves as a formative assessment to chart student progress in critical reading.”

PSSA scores are going to be on the transcript – Council Rock administration reports that interviews with students have revealed that the 11th graders do not take PSSA testing seriously. To comply with Chapter 4 regulations of the Pennsylvania School code, and to counteract students’ contention that their PSSA scores do not matter, beginning this year, the 11th grade PSSA proficiency levels will be reported on student transcripts in all four course areas (Reading, Math, Writing and Science). It is hoped that since the colleges will now see each student’s PSSA scores, an 11th grader’s motivation to do their best will be improved.

Citizens would like to thank Council Rock South’s reading teacher, Shannon Gehman, for her enthusiasm toward students who struggle with reading and for sharing the progress they have made in the new Council Rock Read 180 program. Citizens would also like to thank RELA coordinator, Peggy Walsh, and Director of Elementary Education and Curriculum Services, Joy McClendon, for their assistance with this article. Citizens will follow up with Ms. Walsh and Ms. McClendon when more testing results are available for those in the new reading initiatives.