

## **An Overview of Reading, English and Language Arts**

To get an understanding of Council Rock's "Reading, English and Language Arts" (RELA) department and to follow up on some previous Reading articles, Citizens met with the Director of Elementary Education/Curriculum Services, Joy McClendon and Elementary Program Coordinator, Patricia Erickson.

### **CR's RELA Coordinators**

Last year, the RELA department was realigned from one full time Curriculum Coordinator to two half-time positions. The position is divided between Peggy Walsh, who coordinates secondary level RELA issues and Pat Erickson, who does the same for the elementary level. Both have considerable experience in these areas. Peggy is a high school English teacher and former department chair. Pat, a Council Rock graduate, is a long time teacher at Sol Feinstone. Both continue to teach at their respective levels for one half of the school day. Citizens will sit down with Peggy Walsh for our spring newsletter. Our conversation with Joy McClendon and Pat Erickson, who both have educational reading certifications, focused in on Elementary RELA, especially Reading remediation.

### **Elementary RELA Committee**

Mrs. Erickson, who has extensive credentials in Reading, Reading Recovery and as an adjunct reading instructor at Holy Family University, oversees a Council Rock Elementary RELA committee that is made up of 35 teachers and the Literacy Specialists from all 10 elementary schools. The Committee meets the first Monday of every month after school. The committee members represent their schools in the decision making process for RELA curriculum changes and initiatives, monitor pilot projects, and are the conduit for RELA information and feedback between teachers and the district.

Currently, the district is piloting a data driven "grammar in writing" program in ten first and sixth grade classrooms. Identical pre and post testing will be given to both students in and not in the pilot program, to help measure the program's success. Thus far, the piloted text is getting rave reviews and the RELA committee is very hopeful that there will be enough funding to do implementation across the district in the upcoming budget.

### **Reading Assessments**

Council Rock uses a variety of assessment instruments through the elementary years. Some are administered on a regular basis and others used as needed during the school year to check specific skills.

At the beginning of each school year, elementary students, Kindergarten through sixth grade, are evaluated for decoding, comprehension, fluency and writing with an assessment developed by Council Rock RELA committee in 2001 and revised in 2003 and 2009.

Beginning in first grade, all students are also tested using DIBELS (The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills). DIBELS has been empirically validated to be a measure of student progress, as well as a predictor of later reading proficiency. It has been proven reliable in core components of reading such as phonological awareness, accuracy and fluency with connected text, vocabulary and comprehension. It identifies which students are extremely likely to struggle without intervention and what approach is needed to support their success.

Students in grades 3 through 6 are tested with a number of assessment instruments including “Scholastic Reading Inventory” (SRI). SRI is an on-line based comprehension assessment given at least 3 times per year.

### **Response To Intervention**

Council Rock uses the PA State Initiative “Response to Intervention” (Rtl) strategy to enable early identification and intervention of students. Rtl was first piloted in Council Rock in 2007-2008. It is a 3-tiered approach:

- Tier 1 sets a high quality for standards-aligned instruction for all students, who are universally screened 3 times per year.
- Tier 2 is for some students who require additional support. They are given strategic and targeted interventions. Interventions are scientifically research-based and given by a specialist or teachers in the classroom, or in small group instruction, as needed. Tier 2 also dictates progress monitoring of all students to determine academic and behavioral status against grade level benchmarks.
- Tier 3 is an intensive intervention for a few students who are significantly below grade level benchmarks. They can be given individual or small group instruction with additional time and/or resources.
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### **Reading Intervention**

The determination for considering a student’s eligibility to receive reading support might be based on assessments including those given to all students or only given to students experiencing difficulty. Support is also given to students following teacher recommendation, as a result of prior reading support or prior Report Cards.

The assessments drive the type of the instruction given to a student, and teachers in Council Rock have an extensive list of approved researched-based interventions for different grade levels. Some examples of Council Rock Approved Kindergarten Interventions are: *Earobics* (a multisensory intervention); *Words Their Way* for phonics, vocabulary and spelling; and *Florida Center for Reading Research Materials* for phonemic awareness, alphabetizing, handwriting and fluency.

There are many Interventions listed for Grade 1, but *Reading Recovery* is the short-term, early intervention that serves the lowest achieving first grade students. The district has been using *Reading Recovery* since 2000. Citizens did an article about Reading Recovery in its Spring 2006 newsletter and will do an update in Spring 2010.

Council Rock strives to keep students in Grades 1 and 2 who need remediation in their classroom as long as they can. In grades 1 and 2 there are Title 1 tutors available in 8 of the 10 elementary schools. The Title 1 funding is based on the amount of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Two years ago CR purchased the program "Making Meaning," which teaches further comprehension in grades 4, 5 and 6. With older students there is more emphasis on a "pushing in vs. pulling out" model for reading support, when appropriate.

For students in 1<sup>st</sup> grade who do not sustain gains after receiving *Reading Recovery*, or for students in all other grades whose testing, teacher recommendation, or state assessments demonstrate needed intervention, student intervention can take the form of a pull out reading support program by the literacy specialist called "Reading Club" or, if needed, a one-on-one program.

### **Tracking Individual Students**

In addition to looking at aggregate data, Council Rock keeps longitudinal data on individual students through a program called "Performance Tracker." Teachers enter RELA assessment scores for students in K, 1 and 2 after individual assessments are completed. The assessments of students in grades 3 through 6 are scanned electronically from a bubble sheet into "Performance Tracker." This electronic scanning is not yet operative for grades K, 1, and 2. Individual scores, which include state and other assessments, go with every student in CR through grade 12. Additionally, since assessments are standards-specific, Performance Tracker can provide analysis of these assessments.

### **Tracking Council Rock Student Reading**

The No Child Left Behind Act requires that Council Rock be tracked for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The State's measure for how well students are achieving in reading is through the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, better known as PSSA. The

2008-09 targets for reading were 63% Proficient or Advanced. Under the law, all students must be proficient in reading by 2014.

In the 2008-09 PSSA “all students” category, Council Rock elementary students are more than meeting the federal achievement goals. Proficiency levels were as follows: 88.1% in grade 3, 87.4% in grade 4, 78.4% in grade 5 and 82.8% in grade 6. A three-year look at how the same set of students (with some variables as some students come in and other leave) from 2005-06 to 2008-09 shows continued gains.

### **Elementary RELA Summary**

Breaking down the leadership of RELA into the 2 levels of instruction for Elementary and Secondary seems to have paid dividends to the elementary program. Not only has the elementary level continually raised PSSA reading scores, they are also well on track to meet AYP goals. This is empirical evidence that the well-balanced standards based curriculum is serving students with a broad foundation in reading competency.

The outstanding results are a tribute to the classroom teachers, the literacy specialists and the leadership of Joy McClendon and Pat Erickson, whose depth of knowledge, dedication and enthusiasm contribute to success. Citizens recognizes and commends the good work they and the teachers, under their leadership, do that benefits Council Rock Students.