

Conference tips and talking points for communicating to parents when their child is not a grade level reader in third grade.



Be clear about how far below grade level a child is currently. DRA levels don't mean much to a parent, but grade level does. "Cindy is currently reading like a beginning of the year second grade student."

Show comparative examples of grade level text and the child's actual reading level text. Show parents an actual book the child is reading alongside a grade level book. You may wish to use a non-fiction text due to the emphasis on non-fiction in our new state standards.

Communicate your high expectations and absolute belief that the child can be a grade level reader. Share that it will take a partnership of you, the parent and student, working together that will support the child to be a successful reader. Parents trust you and are more likely to believe and work with you when they know you care and believe in their child.

Be specific in your plan to assist the student in become a proficient reader.

- Provide strong core instruction using research-based district adopted materials.
- Provide small group instruction focused on improving the student's reading skills.
- Provide time daily for the student to engage in high success reading.
- Provide students time and support to respond to their reading in meaningful ways.
- Provide the student and parent with specific feedback on what they know and need to practice.
- Assist the student in setting goals to improve their reading.
- Teach content vocabulary.
- Provide the student opportunities to read content rich text.
- Work with other teachers in the building to provide reading support as needed.

"Go Fourth Summer Academy" summer opportunity (Do NOT call it summer school!)

To be recommended to students at risk of scoring at a level 1 on the ELA Smarter Balanced Assessment in March/April.

Be upbeat- **this is not a punishment or consequence.** We all want children for whom we are responsible to be grade level readers by the end of third grade. This is a support for students who need more time and intensity to reach that goal.

- July 20-August 20, Monday – Thursday
- 8:15 – 1:00 daily including breakfast and lunch
- Transportation provided from neighborhood school to Go Fourth and Succeed site
- Activities include:
 - Specific reading and writing practice to meet each student's need(s)
 - STEM activity such as chess, robotics, or computer programming
 - Small group learning
 - Bags of books to read at home

Grade placement, NOT retention. SB 5946 does not require a student at a level 1 to be retained. Most children do not benefit from repeating the same learning over for a second year.

- Encourage more time to practice reading during Go Fourth Summer Academy.
- Describe for the parent the support that the student will receive in the fall. Students at a level 1 on the Smarter Balanced Assessment will begin the year with reading support. The Go Fourth Summer Academy students will begin that support earlier and more intensely. What a great idea!
- We want children to be a part of their grade level friend groups, but also want them to be in a place they can learn. Summer learning, fall intervention and parent support will assist the student in attaining grade level learning.
- Whenever we consider retention, we are obligated to answer, "What will we do differently" that will increase the learning of the child.
- Focusing instruction on reading improvement will make a difference for most children.

"I know you are concerned that Mary is not reading at grade level and so am I. But I do believe that if we focus extra work on reading with some summer learning and focused intervention now and in the fall, that will pay off more for Mary rather than repeating everything in third grade."

Why the focus on third grade reading? Spokane Public Schools has established a goal of all students attaining a high school diploma and leaving high school ready to enter a post-secondary option without remediation. These options include military, technical school, a 2 year AA degree program or a 4 year college (T-2-4). One of the identified benchmarks for students to be able to meet this goal is reading at grade level by the end of third grade (Ann E. Casey Foundation. *Early Warning! Why Reading at the End of Third Grade Matters*, 2010). Because we have not increased the number of students meeting the grade level goal over the past few years, we have adopted new core instructional reading materials and increased (for the short term) the number of reading intervention teachers in the primary grades.

Spokane Public Schools is not alone in flat reading scores. As the legislators looked at data from the state assessment, they were concerned that too many third grade students were moving into fourth without the ability to be successful because they were not reading at grade level. Their attempt to push schools to improve student reading performance is evident in SB5946. This bill holds schools and school districts accountable for student reading performance to improve and is intended to ensure that parents understand the struggle their child will face if not a grade level reader leaving third grade.

We have been talking about our goal of all students reading at grade level by the end of third grade for several years. We have in place everything we need to make this goal a reality.

- A strong new ELA core set of materials that support the Common Core State Standards.
- Great teachers who are working hard to implement the materials and CCSS.
- Principals that know how to monitor for implementation of curriculum and pedagogy.
- A research-based model of early reading intervention.
- Families who want their child to be a reader.

Spokane Public Schools is committed to each child in the district and to providing them success. The district and legislators agree that all children should leave third grade being a grade level reader. If they are not, they should exit with a plan that will help them to become one no later than fourth grade. Our work is really about this goal, grade level reading, not about a law that is the legislators' solution to have us do what we know is the right work.

A note on the Lexile level of the informational text, *A Medieval Feast*, on the back of the parent conference communication form. All the grade level texts were taken directly from the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects Appendix B: Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks and Appendix C: Samples of Student Writing*. The exemplar is an 840L while the Lexile range is up to 820L. We noticed that several times the exemplar texts in the CCSS manual were a bit above the range guide. We should reassure parents that we acknowledge the idea of range and that finding exact text to describe a level is difficult. Feel free to show parents other grade level text as well as the exemplar.