



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Reading Now Network?

- The Reading Now Network is the collective effort of superintendents, school boards, local and intermediate school districts throughout West Michigan to improve early literacy and, ultimately, student achievement across all grade levels.

How is this different than what we do today?

- Too often, teachers, schools and school districts work in isolation, attempting to overcome all obstacles on their own. These schools are going to break down the barriers, work together, share their best work and inspire all to do better.

What schools are involved?

- Schools in 13 West Michigan counties were invited to join this effort. All will be asked to make a commitment to share their data, allow their instructional practices to be reviewed, and to participate in summits and symposiums that will illuminate success, evaluate what is being done, and advocate for deploying those methods regionally.

What is the problem?

- Statewide, about a third of students fall short of reading proficiency measures in third grade. Our region's data is very similar to that of the state as a whole, so we currently have about 67 percent of 3rd graders reading at grade level. Our goal is 80 percent and higher when possible.
- Not all students are developmentally ready for reading when they're in 3rd grade, so we need to clearly understand how to help those students continue to make progress and then learn to read as they are able.
- Many schools within our region exceed the 80 percent goal, but none of the counties **as a whole** are above 80 percent. In addition, there are many that are "beating the odds" with the population they serve. We want to learn from the best and apply their strategies in the rest.

Who else is involved?

- The Talent 2025 employer-led initiative to enhance the skills and educational attainment of our workforce, and to retain those talented people within our region, shares the third-grade reading proficiency goals with the schools in the region and is a direct supporter of this work
- Grand Valley State is committed to working in concert with schools to help in their data analysis and program evaluation.

Did this happen because of Legislation introduced last fall?

- The legislation introduced by Representative Price was certainly a lightning-rod for conversation around the subject, but the planning among district leaders in these 13 counties started well over a year ago

What is the first thing that will happen?

- We're looking at a three-step process in the first year.
- First will be research. The ISDs asked their instructional leaders to conduct a field study throughout the region to identify those that are doing the best. They will study what is happening in those buildings and classrooms that is leading to this success.
- Second, we'll share early results in a Best Practices Summit this fall.
- Third, we're planning a Reading Symposium for teachers for the spring of 2015.

Is there a cost for schools to be involved?

- There is no cost. Schools are asked to share and analyze data to highlight what works and improve where the data and instructional practices prove to be more effective

Is there a specific program or set of instructional practices schools will be asked to implement?

- This is not oriented toward any one program, instructional practice or pedagogy. Instead, it is intended to illuminate what is working well, evaluate what makes that practice or program better than others, and replicate it elsewhere. No one program can meet the needs of all students, so we expect many successes to be highlighted and replicated based on the needs of the needs of the districts and demographics they serve.

What does it mean for parents and students?

- It means participating districts are going to do whatever it takes to employ the best instructional techniques, educational materials and additional assistance students need in grades Pre-K through 3 to read at grade level.

What does it mean for school staff?

- Participating districts will analyze their own data about reading and share it with others. They will compare their results with the "beating the odds" schools uncovered in a field study by instructional staff from several ISDs. Staff will discover strategies that are working well, along with those that aren't. Some districts will find they are achieving demonstrated success with particular types of students, and will share their strategies.
- Through this benchmarking, all schools will benefit from the strategies and programs that truly work. Teachers and building leaders will play a key role in identifying their own best practices and bringing new ones into their districts – all to help students learn to read.

Who can I call to learn more?

- Call your local ISD for more information.