

## Lessons from the Kennewick School District Reading Success Model



*How the 90% Reading Goal changed one school district...  
Kennewick did it; now your school can have the same remarkable, sustainable reading scores.*

### Introduction

In schools nationwide far too many students struggle academically, especially minority students from under-resourced families. If a student is not a proficient reader by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, the odds of future academic and life success are greatly diminished. The consequences for the student, their family, their community and the national economy are painful. Every elementary school can reach the goal of high 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency. The Kennewick School District has established beyond any doubt that this goal is achievable. If any school is not achieving the 90% Reading Goal for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students, there are proven guidelines and resources that can help close the gap and reach the goal.

### The Crisis

- 70% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders who read below grade level never catch up.
- State officials predict the number of prison cells based on 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading scores.
- 70% of high school dropouts have reading problems.
- 89% of Latino and 86% of African-American middle and high school students read below grade level.

### The Crisis Does Not Have to Continue

The Kennewick school district in the state of Washington developed an exceptional demonstration of successful achievement with a 90% reading proficiency record for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students. In the district, over 50% of students qualify for the school lunch program. Initially only 57% of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students read at or above grade level. Their success story has been captured in the book, Annual Growth, Catch-Up Growth. (<https://readingfoundation.mmaweb.net/store/growth.jsp>)

### The Secrets to Kennewick's Success

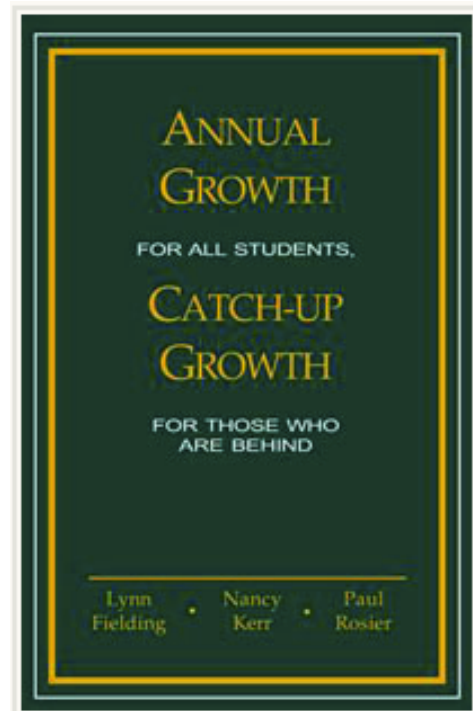
#### **1. It started with building awareness and believing success is possible.**

On average, our education system is facing unacceptable low reading proficiency rates. Most schools have already tried their best to reach struggling students, yet they still face what appears to be an insurmountable challenge. Amid concerns, frustrations and even accusations of K-12 academic mediocrity one reality must be understood. Until a child has developed the innate core skills that enable proficient reading, there will be no clear academic path to success for that child.

The Kennewick school district has demonstrated a successful model. There are proven answers.

#### **2. Develop a plan; build a consensus.**

The Kennewick process involved developing a viable plan, building a consensus among the key players, and a significant amount of trial and error. Any school following in their wake can shorten this cycle because of their lessons learned.



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### 3. Understand the need for Catch-Up Growth; targeted accelerated growth.

Struggling students start kindergarten 1-3 years behind compared to successful students. Curriculum is only designed to provide one year of academic growth per grade. So if a student starts behind, how are they going to catch up? The prevailing wisdom that students who start behind will catch up within the existing system is not working and as Kennewick learned, not possible.

Struggling students have to receive intensive catch-up instruction in addition to the traditional curriculum.

Kennewick developed a model called TAG—targeted accelerated growth. This consists of: “1) diagnostic testing to identify the deficient sub-skills for lagging students, 2) proportional increases in direct instructional time, 3) teaching to the deficient sub-skill and 4) retesting to be sure students are actually catching up.”

### 4. Focus on fixing the problem in K-3.

Students who are behind need something such as the TAG process to catch up. Without catch-up interventions, skill deficiencies will continue to impede a student from achieving annual growth. So it is best to address the reading remediation need in K-3 as a first-level priority. Reading proficiency by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade is the key to ongoing academic success in the following grades. Even math scores went up once students became proficient in reading.

### 5. Provide as much intensive reading instruction as needed to catch students up to grade level.

Kennewick schools provided as much extra, intensive reading instruction as each student needed based upon how far behind that individual student was.

#### We can help.

Even though the Kennewick model provides a proven and clear path to success, many districts are facing budget cuts which will make implementation difficult. There is good news. There are steps any school can take now to help students without taxing the budget.

Intensive phonemic awareness training in K-2 is critical to reading success. The CogRead Challenge provides resources to help elementary schools greatly improve phonemic awareness skills without changes in curriculum or the need for extra staffing.

Cognitive First™ is a nonprofit project helping schools achieve a high level of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency. Cog1st, with the help of its corporate sponsors and grantors, is providing elementary schools and after-school programs with access to a great online phonemic awareness training tool at no cost. Any reading teacher can sign up and have their students training within minutes.

To learn more, please click on [Get Started](http://cog1st.org/wordpress/get-started/) (<http://cog1st.org/wordpress/get-started/>) to see the next steps for [parents](#), [reading teachers](#), or [principals](#).

### **The CogRead Challenge: 90% of children reading at proficiency in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.**

If your school is struggling to meet 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency goals, please join our campaign to ensure your students have the underlying skills needed to empower their reading success.

Abraham Lincoln said, “Determine that the thing can and shall be done, and then we shall find the way.” Children can and shall have an equal opportunity to read, learn and achieve. Take the CogRead Challenge. We have the solution—together we shall find the way.

Band Names	Relationship to Grade Level	% of Students Represented
Dark Blue	2 Years above Grade Level	Top 20%
Blue	1 Year above Grade Level	Next 20%
Green	Grade Level Skills	Middle 20%
Yellow	1 Year below Grade Level	Next 20%
Orange	2 Years below Grade Level	Next Lowest 10%
Red	3 Years below Grade Level	Bottom 10%

What is the Grade Level Gap in Your School?