



Hilton Head Elementary School

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Closing the Gap– An Answer to Enhancing Classroom Access to a Large Quantity of Appropriate Books

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Researcher and author Richard Allington in his latest book, What Really Matters For Struggling Readers, is emphatic about having a large supply of books across a range of difficulty levels – “a range at least as wide as the range of reading achievement levels of the students who come to that room every day.” (Allington, 2000). In earlier work (Allington et al., 1996) it was noted that:

- Higher achieving schools had more books in classroom library collections than were found in lower-achieving schools.
- Schools in wealthier neighborhoods had classrooms with larger book collections than were found in schools in poorer neighborhoods.
- Classrooms with a larger supply of books had kids who read more frequently.
- Classrooms with a larger supply of books usually had more kids reading books they could manage successfully.

Classrooms that were best able to put appropriate books into children’s hands and into their desks, had hundreds of titles available in their collection. In exemplary first grade classrooms that were studied, it was an every day occurrence for children to read ten or more titles daily (with rereading).

A recent study (Smith et all, 1998) recorded the number of children’s books available in the homes and classrooms located in schools in three different communities. Their findings point to the enormous inequity in access to books that exist in the United States.

	Books at home	In classroom library
Middle income	199	392
Lower income	2.6	54
Lowest income	.4	47

A wonderful program called **100 Book Challenge** has enabled our school, Hilton Head Elementary, to provide our population of 2100 pre-k thru 5th grade students with 40 thousand books that have been infused into the more than 100 regular education, special education, and ESOL classrooms throughout the complex. **100 Book Challenge** is a systematic independent reading initiative to ensure that every child reads at his or her “just right” level every day in school and at home.

Each classroom receives leveled text libraries that rotate throughout the school. These books are color coded for reading level and are very multicultural in nature covering every interest imaginable. Each classroom teacher is continually receiving 240 different books bi-weekly throughout the year. The object is

for students to read at least 300 books, or for older students, 300- 15-minute chunks throughout the year. Our students become readers and reading becomes intrinsic. Hilton Head Elementary students read over 700,000 books last year alone. You can imagine what this has done for our reading and PACT scores. Hilton Head Elementary is fifty percent minority with close to six hundred Hispanic children who come to us with limited English and very little reading ability, if any, yet our reading scores continue to improve.

Students take home books every night that they can read and want to read. Parents take an active role as the “Home Reading Coach” for their child. The developmental scope and sequence of reading acquisition is made explicit in the color coded skill cards that our many volunteers, parents, and teachers utilize with each student.

Every child is working on reaching their goal of at least three hundred books or 300 fifteen-minute chunks, with many children reaching 500 to 600 and more. We have incentives such as medals and collectables that the children work hard for and love. We track each classroom and student on quantity and independent reading level so that we know how each child progressed during the year.

This is the third year we have been involved in the program and our teachers rave about the books and how it has improved our school’s literacy level. We share this program with the **Hilton Head Island Boys and Girls Club** where approximately 250 of our students attend after school. We have trained their staff and provide books for our students to read there each night.

Jane Hileman, originator of the program, is a reading specialist and university professor in Philadelphia and this program is in 100 Philadelphia elementary schools and many of Baltimore’s elementary schools. Results have been impressive with most schools doubling the amount of students reading on grade level during the first two years of the program. Ms. Hileman has in-serviced our staff and continues to provide staff development. Her website is www.100bookchallenge.com. Our entire school community is thankful and we wish to share this wonderful program with all schools in South Carolina. Please visit us anytime.