

Case Study Series

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African American Males Take Essential Steps Toward College and Career Readiness

Clinton Elementary School of the Lancaster County School District in South Carolina, 2009-2010

AMERICAN
READING COMPANY



Introduction

African American male reading proficiency scores increased from 47 percent in 2009 to 81 percent in 2010.

Clinton Elementary School partnered with American Reading Company to prepare every young student, regardless of race, gender, or income, for college and career readiness in reading. The effort required a renewed mindset for a school that has not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the past three years, has a 24 percent special education population (compared to 13 percent in the state), and has more than 90 percent of all students qualifying for subsidized lunch (compared to 56 percent in the state).

In 2010, all students and all subgroups met AYP performance objectives in reading. On the 2010 Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) language arts exam, the percentage of third-grade students reading on or above grade level increased 26 points, and that of disabled students increased by 17 points, compared to 2009 scores. Among third-grade regular education, economically disadvantaged African American male students, the percentage of students reading on or above grade level increased from 47.4 in 2009 to 81.0 in 2010. These results surpassed the district average by 6 points and surpassed the state average by 10.5 points. With these compelling results, both qualitative and quantitative, Clinton Elementary School is a living example of how to achieve transformational change.

About American Reading Company

The COMMON CORE STANDARDS provide the architecture for all instructional materials, the leveling system, the electronic suite, and professional development.

American Reading Company is a leader in the field of educational solutions (K–8) and is a trusted partner of schools and school districts in 41 states. ARC effects whole-school and whole-district change via the implementation of a Common Core Standards framework that includes formative assessment and independent reading practice using a leveling system for all books (more than 85,000 hand-leveled titles from 250 publishers). Since 1998, American Reading Company has worked to increase teacher quality by enhancing teachers' ability to successfully diagnose students' reading difficulties and providing expert coaching to act on those issues. Districts throughout the United States have seen increased test scores and changes in the literacy culture of their communities through the partnerships with American Reading Company.

A critical component of the American Reading Company's successful model is systematic professional development using a comprehensive, standards-based approach for teachers, teacher leaders, coaches, and school and district administrators. Created by teachers and curriculum specialists, American Reading Company's systematic approach to fostering independent reading is turnkey, intuitive, and proven.

The Partnership

In 2009, Clinton Elementary School's principal embarked on a new reading initiative with American Reading Company to transform the school's culture for reading success.

According to Principal Rachel Ray, "I was in search of a structure that would enhance our existing reading initiatives and get parents involved. It's always a challenge for teachers to juggle the demands of new programs, but this one caught on quickly when results were tangible from the very beginning."

The teachers underwent extensive "elbow-to-elbow" professional development by American Reading Company to hone their conferencing and formative assessment skills. New leveled classroom libraries put the very best books available in print from more than 250 publishers into the hands of a historically underserved student population. Books are used for reading at school and also travel home each night for reading practice under parent supervision.

The Tool

"If you want someone to learn something, give them a tool."

— *R. Buckminster Fuller*
(1968)

About 100 Book Challenge

100 Book Challenge is the reading accountability system from American Reading Company that is built around the Common Core Standards. Research shows that most students who are below grade level in reading are behind because they haven't read enough. 100 Book Challenge changes this, as students are expected to read for 200 hours per school year and receive expert instruction from teachers in school and daily parental involvement at home.

60 Minutes of Daily Reading Practice

Students read 30 minutes in school and 30 minutes at home. Quantity practice targets are set, monitored, and rewarded, ensuring every student adopts the independent reading routines of academically successful students.

Every Student Working at Appropriate Level

Using national standards for reading proficiency, both books and students are leveled based on what readers need to know and be able to do at each of the five developmental stages of reading acquisition, as outlined by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Connects Reading Initiatives to Common Core Standards

100 Book Challenge aligns all existing reading materials and assessment tools using one simple color-coded leveling platform, keyed to Common Core Standards, that students, teachers, and parents can understand and use to ensure every student is making expected progress toward proficiency.

Includes Parent Partnership Routines

As if they had stopped at the bookstore on the way home from school every day with \$15–\$50 to spend, each student arrives home every afternoon with one or two or three—or more—trade books, hot off the press, that are part of a system designed for their achievement. The standards-based book sizing system and take-home Skills Cards keep parents informed and involved in their children's success.

Drivers of Results: The Big Three

New tools spark new attitudes and preparedness for effective reading instruction.

Renewed expectations that every child can and will succeed

Despite all the rhetoric about progress in closing the achievement gap, a significant gap still exists, and it continues to impact the attitude of teachers about whether all children can and will learn to read successfully. According to Principal Ray, “I told our teachers that failure is simply not an option for any child. If a student arrives at school already behind, we can’t make that an excuse for current or future poor performance. Every child can learn to read. And at our school, every child is going to learn to read.”

Over 70 percent of surveyed teachers indicated that 100 Book Challenge had either significantly or somewhat changed their belief that some children cannot learn to read.

Principal’s self-evaluation and public commitment to use new tools for effective instructional leadership

“I have always had high expectations for the students at Clinton. Now I have a vehicle to get us where I always knew we could go,” explains Principal Rachel Ray. “I had been a principal here for four years and prior to that a teacher here for seven years. Despite many efforts, we were all part of what many would describe as a ‘failing’ school. With 100 Book Challenge, I now have a comprehensive set of tools that support the reading ecosystem that is required to get tangible results.”

American Reading Company requires that principals participate in teacher training. According to Ray, “My role as an instructional leader has been transformed as a result of this program, and the new tools have made me a more effective principal.”

Measurable parent involvement in home reading practice and aligning resources to supplement reading for children without home supports

Parents are now actively engaged in home reading and sign on as official home reading coaches. They are given clear responsibilities and training in how to monitor home reading practice. Those students who don’t receive adequate home support are immediately identified, and supplemental reading time is arranged for them during school with a special volunteer coach.

According to Principal Ray, “Parent involvement is making a huge difference here. It’s daily. We monitor it. And most parents are stepping up because the expectations are very clear. We also continually reward the student-parent partnership, so there is huge awareness about their daily participation.”

Of surveyed teachers, 77 percent indicated that 100 Book Challenge had either significantly or somewhat changed the willingness of or ability for parents of economically disadvantaged parents to support literacy in the home.

The Outcome

Qualitative Data

A Likert scale of Summated Ratings was constructed to measure how attitudes and behaviors of teachers contributed to what makes this partnership for reading achievement sustainable. The four-point scale included the following possible responses: 4 = Significantly; 3 = Somewhat; 2 = Not as much as I expected; and 1 = Not at all. The results below reflect the percentage of respondents selecting “Significantly” or “Somewhat” as it relates to teacher experience with 100 Book Challenge.

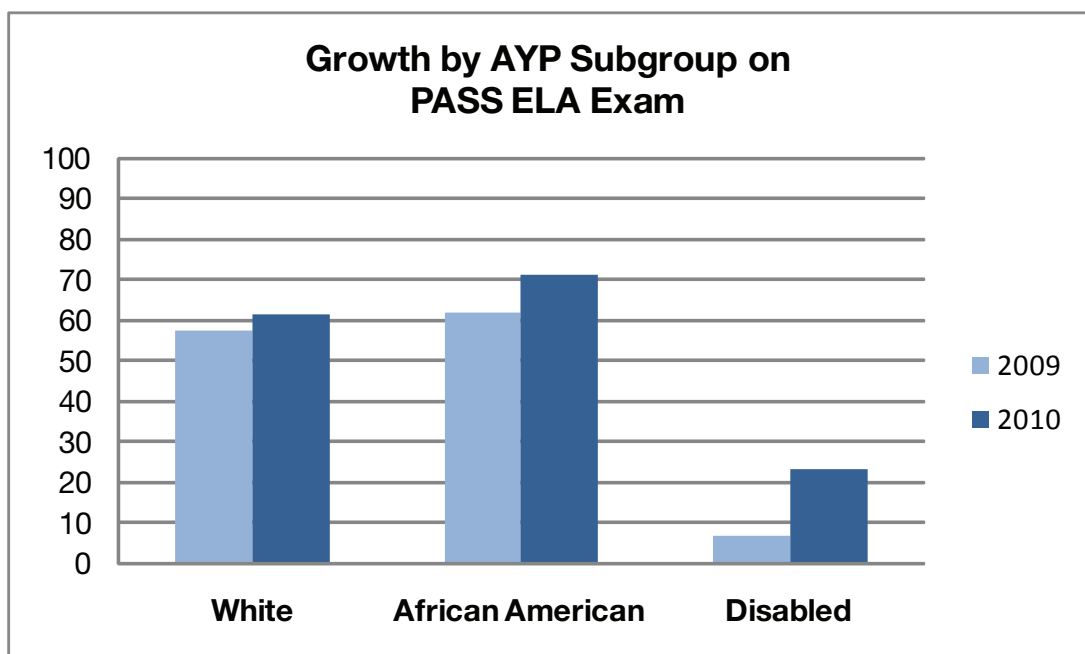
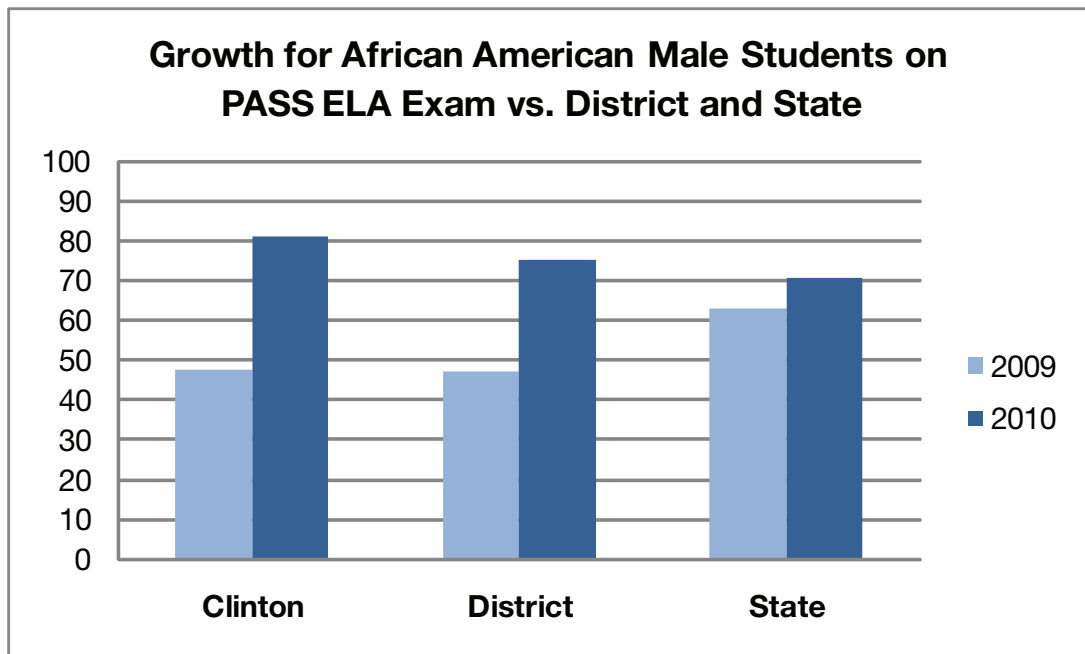
Questions for Teachers		Significantly	Somewhat	Not as much as I expected	Not at all
1	How much has my attitude toward my power and competence as a teacher changed as a result of this experience?	68%	32%	0%	0%
2	How much has my understanding of the importance of collaborating with other professionals about individual students changed as a result of this experience?	86%	14%	0%	0%
3	How much has my knowledge of how to effectively teach reading to all students, including English Language Learners and Special Education students, changed as a result of this experience?	64%	36%	0%	0%
4	How much has my attitude toward balancing the demands of small versus large group instruction changed?	64%	27%	9%	0%
5	How much has my understanding of daily formative assessment changed as a result of this experience?	68%	27%	5%	0%
6	How much has my belief that parents/caregivers of economically disadvantaged children are unwilling or unable to support literacy in the home changed as a result of this experience?	50%	27%	14%	9%
7	How much has my belief that some children cannot learn to read changed as a result of this experience?	48%	24%	10%	19%
8	How much has my belief that what may work in one school can be generalized to other schools changed as a result of this experience?	57%	33%	0%	10%
9	How much has my attendance increased as a result of this experience?	64%	14%	0%	23%
10	How much has my attitude toward MY role in closing the achievement gap for economically challenged students changed as a result?	73%	23%	0%	5%

According to the survey results, 100 Book Challenge has unanimously impacted teachers and their attitudes about their overall effectiveness in teaching reading (Questions 1-3). The program has also dramatically impacted an underlying belief system among teachers about whether all students can learn to read and whether their parents are willing or able to support literacy in the home (Questions 6-7). These attitudinal indicators are essential first steps in creating transformational change for this historically underperforming group of students. With 95 percent of surveyed teachers indicating that their role in closing the achievement gap has changed either significantly or somewhat as a result of 100 Book Challenge (Question 10), teachers are poised to assume the responsibility and actions required to achieve results for every child, regardless of race, gender, or income. 78 percent of teachers acknowledge that this program has either significantly or somewhat impacted their attendance (Question 9), a key indicator of overall job satisfaction and teacher effectiveness.

The Outcome

Quantitative Data

African American males at Clinton Elementary School demonstrated significant gains, outperforming the Lancaster School District and South Carolina state averages. The first chart below documents proficiency results on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) language arts exam for third-grade African American males without Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and receiving lunch assistance. For these African American male students, reading proficiency scores increased from 47 percent in 2009 to 81 percent in 2010. The second chart below highlights the increase in third-grade reading test scores for all three AYP subgroups.



The Conclusion

Clinton Elementary School is a living example of transformational change.

With the nationwide emphasis on preparing African American males for college and career readiness, Clinton Elementary School is a timely example of transformational change that is actually working.

Through the partnership with American Reading Company, Principal Rachel Ray has achieved measurable results in test scores. She has also ignited new, and essential, attitudes among teachers about their effectiveness and ability to close the achievement gap for African American males.

Through renewed expectations for every student, new tools for principal instructional leadership, and measured parent involvement, Clinton Elementary School is making certain that African American males are taking the essential first steps toward college and career readiness.

Limited Bibliography

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“You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

—R. Buckminster Fuller

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