

Hillsborough County Public Schools

### **Catapulting the Struggling Reader from Compliance to Commitment**

In order to earn a standard high school diploma in the State of Florida, students are required to reach proficient reader status on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade state reading assessment. Students who are unsuccessful on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade assessment, are given the opportunity to retake the state reading assessment again in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. School districts are legislatively mandated to provide reading intervention, through an intensive reading course, for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who have not met proficient reader status. The historically provided intervention course was ineffective, as evidenced by pass rates that ranged between 12 to 25 percent over a five year period. After a curriculum review of the intervention course, it was determined that the instruction needed to reflect the unique needs of students who had experienced many years of reading intervention without success. Students lacked motivation to participate in their own remediation, as they failed to see how the traditional intervention approach supported their academic or personal needs. Standards-based reading instruction that incorporates the modeling of reading process skills by the teacher, along with guided and independent practice for students using relevant informational text, became the foundation of the revised intervention course. A program that teaches reading process skills was developed using *USA Today* as the core text, which provides a rich source of relevant informational text that engages the struggling high school reader. Reading process lessons that address each of the state assessed benchmarks are designed to guide students' comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Teachers use the *USA Today* reading lessons as the core of their instruction, along with the use of accountability-based independent reading and test-taking skill instruction.

Since implementing the *USA Today* reading program with non-proficient 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade readers, the number of schools that earned accountability bonus points, which were available for the first time in the 2008 state-formulated accountability grade, increased in 2009. The 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade passing rate also increased over a three year span of school years.

Purchase of the *USA Today* newspapers is funded through the state-approved K-12 Comprehensive Reading Plan budget, allocated annually to support reading efforts in each of Florida's school districts. Hillsborough County Public Schools also supports the program through district funded trainings and through site-based support provided by reading coaches.

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