

Adolescent Literacy Skills Are Lacking, Comptroller's Report Concludes

Many middle and high school students across Tennessee are struggling with serious reading deficiencies, according to a report released today by the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury's Offices of Research and Education Accountability (OREA).

The report provides an overview of adolescent literacy statewide and nationally, discusses how states can effectively address the needs of struggling readers (particularly students in middle and high school grades) and profiles recent actions the Tennessee Department of Education and the State Board of Education have taken to improve adolescent literacy.

Nationally, more than two-thirds of the nation's 8th graders and more than half of 12th graders read below the proficient levels for those grades as determined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). More than a quarter cannot read at the most basic level.

Tennessee's NAEP scores are similar to the national scores, with more than 70 percent of 8th grade students reading at the basic and below basic levels.

About 65 percent of Tennessee schools don't offer reading classes after the third grade. However, the study indicates reading instruction needs to be woven into all types of classes, even at higher grade levels.

The research shows that to develop good literacy skills, adolescents need explicit vocabulary instruction, direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction and intensive interventions for those students with the most severe reading deficiencies.

In general, middle and high school teachers receive little training in reading instruction. In the upper grades in particular, teachers are focused on the subject matter of the courses they teach and may assume that students have all the reading skills they need. National education policy experts say that states should declare adolescent literacy an immediate priority and, most importantly, invest in improving teachers' abilities to help developing readers.

The Tennessee Department of Education has declared a renewed focus on reading. In 2009, the Department created the Office of Reading Information and Proficiency and coordinated two reading summits.

OREA is an agency within the Comptroller's Office that is charged with providing accurate and objective policy research and analysis for the Tennessee General Assembly and the public.

The legislative brief, titled "Tennessee's Efforts to Address Literacy for Adolescent Learners," may be viewed at:

<http://www.comptroller1.state.tn.us/Repository/RE/AdolescentLiteracy.pdf>

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