INTRODUCTION

In 2012, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the “Read to Achieve” initiative, which mandated that beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, third graders, who do not score a Level 3 or above on their reading EOG exams, enter a process of retention. Two components of this process include: (1.) intensive summer reading camps and (2.) transition classes for the retained students. Durham County public schools will be significantly impacted by this initiative. DPS had 2,656 students in the third grade in the 2011-2012 school year. In that same year, 1149 third graders scored a Level 1 or 2 on their reading EOG exam. With “good cause” exemptions for students with disabilities (11.8%) and students with Limited English Proficiency (7.1%) and not accounting for students who would be exempted through instructor-compiled portfolios, it is estimated that just over 900 third graders in Durham Public Schools would qualify for “Read to Achieve” summer reading camps. Due to this large number of qualifying students combined with budget constraints, as this mandate is unfunded, it is imperative that the Durham school district ascertain cost-effective methods of implementing this program effectively. This brief will review the existing literature and provide recommendations for the effective implementation of these reading interventions. It was written in conjunction with an in-depth research paper, which is available upon request.

What are “Read to Achieve” Summer Camps?

According to the North Carolina “Read to Achieve” guidebook, a summer reading camp is “an additional educational program…provided by the local school administrative unit.” Specifically, if a child does not pass the EOGs, his/her parent can choose to send their child to a district-implemented summer
reading camp. If at the end of the camp, the child passes an alternative assessment, that child will be promoted to the fourth grade. The criteria for the summer camps include: (1.) the camp be six to eight weeks long, four or five days per week (2.) consist of three hours per day of instructional time and (3.) be taught by licensed, compensated instructors (North Carolina Read Guide).

What are “Read to Achieve” Transition Classes?

Students who attend the summer reading camps but do not pass the alternative assessment or produce a proficient portfolio will be placed in a 3rd/4th grade transition classroom, a classroom designed to meet 4th grade performance standards while continuing to remediate areas of reading deficiencies. In this transition classroom, students would be taught 4rd grade curriculum with an intensive focus on reading. An opportunity for mid-year promotion still exists for these students if they pass an alternative assessment or produce a reading portfolio demonstrating proficiency by November. The image below illustrates the process of the “Read to Achieve” initiative.

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*Enrollment in Summer Camp is the decision of the parent. If the choice is not to enroll in Summer Camp, the student is retained to a 3rd-grade classroom.

** If the student has already been retained once, the LEA/school shall provide a plan for reading at home, including a contract with parent/guardian.
Funding for “Read to Achieve” Programs

In February 2013, the Fiscal Research Division of the NC General Assembly released a financial budget report, detailing current fiscal allocations for the establishment of the “Read to Achieve Program,” (Fiscal Research Division 2013). This report calculated statewide costs for summer reading programs ($15,465,450), alternative assessment development ($257,613), parental involvement/tutoring initiatives include reading workshops ($23,007,944). Altogether, costs for the Excellent Public Schools Act (the umbrella for the “Read to Achieve” initiative) are projected by the Fiscal Research Division to be $68,586,785 for the 2013-2014 school year, the initial year of implementation. Yet, existing state appropriations for this initiative are currently $27,000,000 (Fiscal Research Division 2013). Durham’s share of these appropriations is currently unknown. Most importantly, as this initiative is an unfunded mandate, local districts are expected to absorb the cost of summer reading camps. Thus, it is vital DPS determine and use cost-effective methods of reading remediation in “Read to Achieve’s” short-term interventions.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The literature review targeted both research based methods of reading remediation as well as effective short-term reading interventions. The review determined that the key components to the successful implementation of a summer remedial reading program include:

1. Targeted training of instructors in remedial reading methods
2. Incorporation of fluency-based and phonetic-based instruction
3. Small group instruction
4. Facilitation of students’ access to appropriate reading material
5. Fostering parental engagement

POLICY RECOMMENDATION FOR DPS

1. Assess Students’ Needs/Reading Deficiencies
Prior to implementation of these interventions, DPS should carefully assess students reading levels and deficiencies to ensure curriculums for students match their needs. This is important, as the students who will participate in the summer camps/transition classes have heterogeneous reading deficiencies. “Read to Achieve” affects students who score either a Level 1 or Level 2 on the reading EOG. Whereas a Level 1 reading score indicates *insufficient reading proficiency* and implies a “minimal use of decoding,” a Level 2 reading score indicates *inconsistent reading proficiency*, (“Reading comprehension EOG,” 2008). For example, a student who scores a Level 2 on their 3rd grade reading EOG may exhibit mastery of decoding (phonetic skills) but lack proficiency in reading comprehension. Students should be assessed using their performance on the 3rd Grade Reading EOGs as well as the LEXILE measure which accompanies the EOG exam. Overall, DPS should assess students’ needs based on individual reading proficiency rather than a grade-based norm.

### 2.) Integrate phonetic-based and fluency-based instruction

According to National Assessment of Educational Progress, in 2011, one-third of entering fourth-graders in the United States lacked basic reading skills, (NAEP 2011). Third grade is an integral period for students, as it is the stage in which decoding words is phased out, to be replaced by an emphasis on reading fluency. Moreover, students participating in either the summer program or the transition class could be potentially promoted to a 4th grade classroom should they pass an alternative assessment. Thus, to match students’ needs and ensure long-term reading gains, DPS should combine a phonetic curriculum with a fluency-based curriculum using research-based methods. One method studies have found to be effective is repeated reading, which involves re-reading a passage “either a specified number of times or to a pre-specified level of fluency,” (Vadasay & Sanders, 2008). A meta-analysis conducted by William Therrien found that repeated reading interventions that (1.) had trained tutors provide appropriate feedback on errors and (2.) had students read until a pre-specified [Correct Words Per Minute] level was
reached were “extremely effective,” (Therrien 2004). Overall, research has indicated that the effective incorporation of both fluency-based and phonetic-based reading interventions yields positive benefits for its participants, specifically third graders.

3.) Train Instructors in Methods of Reading Remediation

A number of studies cite professional development as a key component to the success of their respective interventions. To ensure the success of summer reading camps and transition courses, training should be provided to instructors in specific methods of improving children’s reading fluency such as repeated readings and small group management. A meta-analysis conducted by William Therrien on repeated reading instruction emphasized the importance of professional development (Therrien 2004). Therrien reported that repeated reading interventions that had trained tutors providing correct, appropriate “feedback on word errors” were extremely effective. Ultimately, to ensure that research-based methods to improve third graders’ reading levels are executed correctly, DPS should encourage specialized training of teachers.

4.) Encourage small-group instruction

Due to both budget constraints as well as the large number of qualifying students for the intensive summer reading camps, one recommendation is that DPS encourage small-group instruction. First, small-group instruction is more cost effective than one-on-one tutoring, which would require more instructors/tutors. Also, small-group instruction has been found to be effective in reading remediation. One 2003 study examined the effectiveness of small group reading instruction (using RR) compared to large and one-on-one instruction, (Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Kouzekanani, Bryant, Dickson & Blozis, 2003). They found that although the 1:1 grouping was superior to the 1:10 grouping, the 1:1 grouping was not more effective than the 1:3 (small-group) grouping on any outcome measure. Moreover, another study investigated the effectiveness of small group instruction for struggling readers and found that the effect sizes in the study “typically equaled or exceeded those reported for one-to-one tutoring,” (Rashotte,
MacPhee & Torgeson 2001). These findings suggest that small-group intervention can be an effective tool for reading remediation and a useful tool in “Read to Achieve” summer reading camps and transition classes.

**5.) Actively foster parental involvement**

Summer reading camps under the “Read to Achieve” initiative will last from six to eight weeks long. It is important for students participating in these camps to maintain reading gains acquired from the program in the long-term. Therefore, DPS should be proactive in maintaining positive gains from summer reading programs, particularly by increasing students’ accessibility to appropriate reading material and fostering parental involvement. One method of continued intervention could be sending books (LEXILE-matched to the student reading level) to students’ home during the summer and training parents to tutor their children using research-based methods at home. This comprehensive program emphasizes: student choice and parental involvement, both of which have been found to have positive effects on students’ reading achievements. A 2004 study found that students who chose what they would read had higher reading comprehension and motivation, (Guthrie, Wigfield & Humenick, 2006). Providing appropriately-level books to students, from which they could choose, fosters motivation and interest in reading. In addition, studies have found parent-delivered reading intervention (specifically those emphasizing repeated readings and modeling) by trained parents result in general improvements in oral reading fluency and decreases in error rates, (Daly & Kupzyk, 2012).

**Sources**

