

## Funding Options for Improving 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading

- Teachers are most critical to the effectiveness of a classroom reading program and need to be well supported in the effort to increase student reading skills. Valuable supports **include ongoing professional development, literacy coaches, reading specialists, and additional staff to assist** in the classroom.
- Options for the State and local level are contained in the recent JLARC report for ways to improve reading performance in the early grades. Options focus on providing reading-related training and support for early elementary teachers, supporting effective intervention programs, and maintaining an academic environment supportive of early literacy.
- Outstanding teachers were observed by JLARC staff in both higher-performing and lower-performing school divisions in Virginia, but it appeared that **lower-performing divisions had “pockets of expertise” with expert teachers not as widespread throughout the division.** Ongoing professional development helps lead to highly effective, well-trained teachers. Teachers in lower performing divisions tended to receive less training on how to teach reading, and fewer of these divisions reported frequent use of best practices for reading instruction. **Literacy coaches** can be a valuable support to teachers by providing on-site professional development and in-class coaching. **Reading specialists** are necessary because they provide much needed assistance to struggling students who need additional support beyond the classroom reading program.
- **Literacy Coaches Can Improve the Effectiveness of Teachers**  
An important source of support for classroom teachers is literacy coaches. Literacy coaches support teachers by providing professional development in how to teach reading rather than providing assistance and intervention services to students. What distinguishes the role of a literacy coach from other school staff is the in class coaching and on-site professional development that they provide to teachers. This is significant because research shows that one-time professional development workshops for teachers are often not effective in producing changes in classroom teaching practices or student learning. JLARC found many school staff think that **literacy coaches can be very important, particularly in lower-performing divisions and schools.**

JLARC Recommendation: Provide one literacy coach for a typically-sized school, but allocate two literacy coaches for very large schools that have twice or more the median K-3 fall membership and a part-time literacy coach for small schools with half the median fall membership or less. This would result in 1,123 coaches statewide and an estimated State cost of \$34.5 million annually.

VFC Option: Focus funding for Literacy Coaches in elementary schools with lower performing students. Cost ?

- **Reading Specialists Work With Struggling Students**

The main difference between a literacy coach and a reading specialist is the amount of time spent providing instruction to struggling readers versus working with teachers, and that reading specialists tend to spend most of their time providing supplementary reading instruction to students. Reading specialists can be defined as staff members other than the classroom teachers who work directly with children to improve their reading skills. Reading specialists support the classroom teacher by providing additional instruction to students for whom the classroom program alone is not enough for them to be successful or experience progress with reading. Such specialists have advanced preparation and credentials in early literacy and how to assist struggling readers in particular.

The importance of reading specialists has been recognized in Virginia through the addition of Section 22.1-253.13:2.G of the *Code of Virginia*, which states that “each local school board shall employ the following reading specialists in elementary schools, one full-time in each elementary school at the discretion of the local school board.” Currently, funding is not directly provided for this provision of the Standards of Quality.

JLARC Recommendation: An option based on the *Code’s* requirement of providing one reading specialist in each elementary school for those schools that contain kindergarten through third grade would result in funding for 1,168 reading specialists statewide. Assuming the FY 2012 prevailing instructional salary and benefits for elementary teachers would result in a total cost of approximately \$64.4 million annually for this option. The State share would be approximately \$36.3 million.

VFC Option: Focus funding for Reading specialists in elementary schools with lower performing students. Cost ?