Understanding LEARNING and REPETITION

to Dramatically
Elevate Student Outcomes!

> A short essay to dramatically improve student outcomes by understanding learning fundamentals, academic gaps and pedagogy.

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Executive Summary

Academic performance in Title 1 elementary and middle schools remains chronically stagnant. Nationally, low-income public schools rarely see year-over-year gains exceeding 5%, with between 30 to 70 percent of students consistently failing to meet grade-level standards. While systemic factors and administrative accountability contribute to this inertia – often determined by school boards or charter founders – this paper focuses exclusively on high-impact classroom interventions. Specifically, by examining pedagogical elements and "stop-gap" curricula that, when implemented with absolute fidelity, can dramatically elevate outcomes in literacy, mathematics, and science and effectively eradicate the achievement gap.

Sustained academic growth in all classrooms begins with effective student management, efficient routines, and strong teacher-student relational trust. Additionally, when teachers establish clear expectations and high standards for quality work, students often complete their assignments with little need for external motivation. However, to move beyond basic engagement and significantly impact performance, educators must address three specific areas: spaced repetition pedagogy, prior grade level academic gaps, and threshold (mastery-level) repetitions. It is these three areas that significantly reduce the stubbornly stagnant academic performance at Title 1 campuses.

Mastery thresholds are independent of core subjects like math and science but remain highly dependent on student cognitive ability. In public school elementary and middle school classrooms, teachers must navigate within a single instructional period a diverse spectrum of learners ranging from gifted and talented children to special education students. The challenge lies in delivering dynamic lessons that prevent high-ability students from disengaging during the repetition cycles necessary for others to reach mastery. *Spaced repetition pedagogy* provides an ideal pedagogical framework for this, allowing teachers *of all experience levels* to provide mastery skill and application levels in Title 1 schools. By utilizing this instructional method *and stop-gap curricula*, educators can efficiently return struggling students to Tier 1 grade-level proficiency within one school year.

Steven Johnson's concept of the "adjacent possible" suggests that innovation and progress rely on viable sequencing; without necessary precursors, the next phase cannot occur. This concept is highly applicable to education. When students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, have significant skill gaps from prior grades, standard sequential lesson planning becomes difficult. Similarly, these academic gaps also press students into a non-linear learning situation, as their "adjacent possible" for new concepts is untenable. However, spaced repetition pedagogy in conjunction with stop-gap curricula offers a systematic, adaptable instructional system *to close academic gaps from prior grade levels*. It enables teachers *of all experience levels* to effectively build skill sequences in any core subject. Due to its simplicity, this pedagogical method allows new and seasoned educators to produce similar high-quality academic outcomes.

To achieve transformative social and academic results, educators must prioritize and fully integrate spaced repetition pedagogy and stop-gap curricula into their instructional frameworks. This methodology is a high-leverage tool for dramatically increasing student achievement without requiring additional school funding. By focusing existing instructional time on either discrete skill mastery or integrated application tasks, spaced repetition instruction ensures that students can confidently engage with grade-level content daily.

About the Author

Blaine Helwig is a local, state and nationally recognized campus administrator and was the J. Walter Graham Elementary Principal in Austin ISD for over 9 years. In that time period, J. Walter Graham Elementary (an urban Title 1 school) experienced dramatic and sustained academic success with typical inner city challenging student demographics. From 2009 to 2016, Graham Elementary School's academic performance earned exemplary accountability ratings and every possible academic distinction by the Texas Education Agency. The school was honored as a 2012 National Blue Ribbon School recipient, and the campus was featured as a National Blue Ribbon Profile School for academic excellence on the United States Department of Education's website - one of only four schools in the country to receive this prestigious honor. The Graham campus has also been recognized annually by Education Non-Profit Organizations for high and sustained academic performance. Finally, the language arts, mathematics and science stop-gap resources implemented at Graham that produced heightened student success are currently used in many other Title 1 campuses and districts with similar high percentages of English Language Learners, minority and low socioeconomic student populations.

In 1985, after completing a Bachelor of Science degree in Architectural Engineering from the University of Texas at Austin, Mr. Helwig worked for seven years as a senior structural design engineer, analyzing and designing state and federal highway bridges. He was also employed as a civil engineer in California and Utah with the United States Department of Defense as a lead project technical engineer overseeing earthen and hydraulic dam construction and large civil works projects. At present, Mr. Helwig retains his license as a registered professional engineer in Texas with a structural engineering specialization. Finally, Mr. Helwig is extremely appreciative of the United States Military for their financial support for his college education. He is a proud veteran of both the United States Army and the United States Air Force.

Mr. Helwig was conferred a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting in 1992. During this period of business study, he pursued additional and concentrated coursework in both economics and finance. After working as an accounting director for a large library system in central Texas, he was alternatively certified to work as an elementary teacher by the University of Texas. He taught fourth and fifth grade self-contained classrooms in the Round Rock Independent School District for six years. It was during those professional years that extensive language arts, science, social studies and mathematics curriculum were developed. The initial design work on the numeracy and literacy stop-gap resources was completed, implemented and beta-tested in intermediate classrooms. Those stop-gap intervention programs significantly evolved during his Title 1 school experience and are currently used by tens of thousands of elementary students in both traditional public schools as well as charter schools across the State of Texas.

In 2004, he was awarded a master's degree in educational administration from Texas State University and worked for two years as the assistant principal at Charlotte Cox Elementary in the Leander Independent School District, a suburban school district near Austin. He began work in the Austin Independent School District in 2006 as an Elementary Program Supervisor under the direction of the Associate Superintendent's Office. A year later, he started his principal assignment at J. Walter Graham Elementary and maintained that capacity until his retirement in the fall of 2016. In 2012, Mr. Helwig was recognized by the United States Department of Education as one of seven recipients in the country with the prestigious Terrel H. Bell award for school transformation for producing outstanding student achievement for all students regardless of race, language proficiency and socioeconomic status. He was also the 2012 recipient of the Central Texas HEB Principal Excellence in Education Award and a five-time nominee and a two-time finalist for Austin ISD Principal of the Year.

Currently, Blaine Helwig is a curriculum writer and a Title 1 education consultant in rural and urban school social and academic transformation. He is a cofounder of Celestial Numeracy, a daily numeracy program that presently serves over 100,000 elementary and middle students each day as well as a cofounder of The New 3Rs Academic Transformation.

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Understanding LEARNING and REPETITION – Elevating Student Outcomes!

By Blaine Helwig

Every time I hear the word, **PRACTICE**, my gut reaction is to mentally recall the 2002 Philadelphia 76ers infamous press conference when Allen Iverson <u>repeatedly</u> utters, **"We are talking about practice, man. Not a game!"** The press conference continues for what seems an eternity with Iverson repeating and repeating the word, <u>**practice**</u> until the reporters covering the interview are laughing. Once watched, it is unforgettable. If you have not seen it, check out the video on You Tube. You will understand completely why it is an unforgettable interview. He repeats the word 'practice' so many times that the incident and word is ingrained in a viewer's long-term memory.

Now, full-disclosure, Allen Iverson is a retired, famous, athletically gifted and hall-of-fame professional basketball player. His athletic ability was undeniably at a world class level. Now, having said that, he still needed to practice basketball skills to perform at a high level. But with his physical gifts, he probably needed to practice less than a tiny fraction of people that ever dribbled a basketball on a hardwood court. Allen Iverson possessed that level of gifted athletic ability.

Mastery of most human tasks is achieved through solitary, repetitive practice. This remains empirically true even when the skill is ultimately intended for team sports or collaborative group efforts. While participants inevitably bring diverse attributes and skill levels to a project, the fundamental components of their contribution are almost always refined in isolation. Many learning progressions begin with rudimentary, interdependent skills. Because these skills follow a strict sequence, mastery of one is a prerequisite for advancing to the next.

Human undertakings that require repeated practice include learning to play a guitar, studying a non-native foreign language, driving an automobile, replacing the worn disc pads on one's car brakes, learning to read, teaching literacy or mathematics in an elementary classroom, becoming mathematically numerate, etc., etc., etc. The list of human endeavors that require repeated practice to achieve mastery appears infinite when we start considering all the tasks humans do each day. Of course, the higher the innate aptitude one possesses, the less repeated practice is usually required to fully master a skill or a set of simultaneous skills (i.e. an application) utilized at one time. Having said that, let's return to former NBA superstar, Allen Iverson. While his demeanor was often debated, Iverson's innate physical ability was undeniable, allowing him to achieve skill mastery with a fraction of the individual practice required by the vast majority of other basketball players.

Practice – Required Repetitions to Achieve Mastery

'We are talking about practice' – specifically, I am referring to the repeated attempts required to fully master a desired skill into long-term memory (i.e., ingrained long-term learning). I have written on this topic in the past, and I will briefly repeat the relevant aspect of that writing below – with regard to the number of repetitions required for a school-aged child to master a core content skill or application in mathematics, literacy, social studies, or science in a typical classroom environment.

Hence, the central and ubiquitous question to answer is, **"How many repetitions are required to master a typical academic skill?"** The answer based on my formal and empirical education, professional observations and life experiences is – **It depends**!

After working with elementary-aged students for the crux of my public education career, there are three (3) general student group classifications listed below that I believe are empirically valid and accurate depending upon the child's cognitive situation.

- ❖ *Talented and Gifted (TAG) Students:* Between 1 to 3 repetitions required – the Allen Iverson metaphor
- ❖ *Regular Education Students:* Between 8 to 18 repetitions required
- ❖ *Students Receiving Special Education Services:* Varies on student disability – sometimes very few repetitions are needed and sometimes a great many – refer to the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

The above breakdown based on student classification indicates an obvious challenge to any classroom teacher. *Why?* Every classroom in every public school is comprised of these three (cognitive) student groups; consequently, the question that every educator must address is quite simple, *"How do I teach all students to skill and application mastery when the associated repetitions vary widely among diverse student groups?"*

The answer is not difficult, but it is **without a doubt and unfortunately** the *road less travelled in public school pedagogy*. In fact, it is __one__ of the primary reasons so many low-income students remain academically below grade level as they transition to succeeding grade levels in elementary school. Frankly, I was constantly baffled that so many elementary children do not achieve grade level literacy and arithmetic proficiency in the United States, and state legislatures and education agencies do not actively challenge the continued ineffective practices in the public school system. However, after working in the school system in different capacities for three decades, I discovered there are reasons for that. If the reader possesses interest in this topic, I have also written on that topic in great depth.

Note: It is of paramount importance that the reader understands, once a task is mastered to a desired level of proficiency, it takes significantly less time to regain that former level of proficiency after an absence of time. The required time to relearn that task will vary on several factors including task complexity, the amount of time that has passed since a person last completed that task, original levels of competency (proficient or at an expert level), and one's age.

Critical Understanding of Skill and Application Development – 60,000 Foot Overview

Educators must recognize that foundational skills are the essential scaffolding for both dependent abilities and complex applications. In literacy, this progression begins with letter recognition and advances to phonemic mastery, such as blends and digraphs. Through deliberate and consistent practice, these isolated skill components integrate, enabling students to decode sentences with increasing fluency and ease while reading.

While most American preschoolers arrive with solid home-language skills, those entering programs where the instruction language differs from their native tongue face additional challenges. For these students, particularly those from low-income immigrant families, a more intensive pedagogical strategy is often required. Because they lack foundational oral skills in the school's target language, primary grade educators must prioritize listening comprehension, phonics, phonemic awareness, and word fluency as the primary engines for reaching grade-level reading proficiency. If the reader is interested in the language acquisition process, refer to the white papers, resources and blogs on this literacy topic.

While an oversimplification of language acquisition, the process described above reflects a universal truth: *learning in any discipline is highly sequential*. To master core content in a typical and diverse classroom, teachers must address specific skill gaps through systematic "stop-gap" curricula; then and only then, educators are able to bridge prior learning deficits when teaching grade-level material. In a sentence, *stop-gap curricula must systematically target each student's academic skill gaps while concurrently, the teacher employs efficient and effective spaced repetition pedagogy that addresses all three student groups*. Without this dual approach, low-income and immigrant students will continue to struggle with literacy and mathematics – a trend of low proficiency that has plagued Title 1 classrooms for half a century.

How to Teach to Skill and Application Mastery

One of the main mastery issues of grade level content and prior grade level academic skill gaps is not too much repetition, but too little.

An effective teacher must be able to adapt to differing student academic needs efficiently and effectively, or 30 to 60 percent of their students do not master grade level content. Spaced repetition pedagogy affords content mastery to occur in real time for all students!

Student mastery through pedagogical repetition is not a one-size-fits-all process; the frequency and type of practice required vary significantly based on the nature of the core content being taught. For instance, arithmetic mathematics has a finite, two skill-based operations (e.g. math facts and math processing skills); whereas each set of skills are directly embedded into an application (i.e., a traditional word or story problem).

In contrast, reading development is generally categorized into two distinct phases: learning to read and reading to learn (i.e., comprehension). The first phase focuses on decoding and mechanical fluency, typically the primary goal of the early grades. The second phase, which emphasizes deep comprehension and critical analysis, becomes the central focus of the intermediate grade levels.

Moreover, in the primary grades, the instructional focus is largely restricted to foundational mechanics: phonemic awareness, systematic phonics, and word fluency. During this phase, educators prioritize "basic comprehension," the ability to follow simple narratives in developmental readers or early chapter books. This level of instruction is fundamentally skill-based and rote in nature; it serves as a prerequisite for the more complex, abstract cognitive processes required for "reading to learn," which governs literacy in the intermediate grades. Writing development follows a similarly incremental, skill-based trajectory. It begins with the mastery of orthography—the ability to spell simple English words—and understanding how those words combine to form basic grammatical sentences. As students mature, this foundational process expands: they move from simple structures to complex sentence construction and eventually to paragraph formation. At this advanced stage, the focus shifts toward logical sequencing, requiring students to organize thoughts coherently to convey increasingly sophisticated ideas.

In general, science instruction follows a similar logic: students must first internalize the basic principles of Earth, Physical, and Life sciences before they can apply them to real-world scenarios or explain them in written and auditory formats. Again, these are gross oversimplifications of the main core content areas, but the salient point is that effective and efficient pedagogical systems usually vary to secure mastery of each specific content area – and learning dependent skills in sequence is an important part of the learning process. To illustrate the necessity of sequence, consider multi-digit multiplication: a student cannot master a 3×2 computation without first understanding the conceptual meaning of multiplication and achieving automaticity with single-digit facts. In practice, attempting complex multi-step problems is nearly impossible until those foundational facts are memorized to the point of instant recall. A 3×2 multi-digit computation is not the immediate/adjacent "next step" after learning single digit multiplication facts. Of course, there is a critical sequence of dependent skills to learn first—such as understanding place value, physical meaning, and smaller digit multiplication computations that must be bridged to transition from basic facts to multi-digit proficiency.

Let's focus on the **math**, **reading** and **science** content areas in more instructional detail with regard to student mastery via repetitional practice.

1.) **Math.** Spaced Repetition offers a dynamic pedagogical approach that scales naturally across diverse student populations—from Gifted and Talented (TAG) and general education to most students with

learning disabilities. By adjusting the frequency of review based on individual performance, this method ensures all students reach mastery without the risk of boredom. Furthermore, its straightforward structure allows for seamless implementation by educators at any level of experience.

However, in the memorization and mastery of math facts as well as guaranteeing math processing skill proficiency, another programming step is required. It is highly beneficial to implement a global, schoolwide math numeracy program like **Formative Loop**. Otherwise, students struggle with math fact dependent math processing skills such as multiple digit computational skills. To enhance application skills, specifically word and story problems, a structured paper-and-pencil daily format provides a clear path to mastery. This approach allows teachers to use active monitoring to identify specific problem types requiring additional spiral review within the spaced repetition system. In the end, entire classrooms of students master math facts and math processing skills as well as prior grade level academic deficient skills, and problem-solving applications. Once students have secured foundational problem-solving techniques through the fall semester, they can effortlessly transition to digital assessment formats. It is important to establish norms and expectations prior to transitioning to a digital medium.

Note: In the coming months, a comprehensive video detailing the Spaced Repetition pedagogical technique will be available for free download on the **New 3Rs website** under the 'Videos' tab. By implementing this structured approach, schools can fundamentally transform their math outcomes—enabling over 90 percent of students to meet or exceed state standards within a single academic year. Please refer to the footer for the website URL address.

2.) **Reading.** As described above, phonetically decoding words and associated phonemic letter sounds in comparison to comprehending what one reads are two different literacy learning stages. It is for this reason that in the primary grades, a teacher should be repetitive on phonemes, word decoding and word fluency so children master correct pronunciation of all words encountered during guided and independent reading sessions. In these learning stages, a teacher can use spaced repetition to ensure that students learn the letter sound skills and apply them into word study, read aloud, and guided reading sessions. However, it is imperative – especially in Title 1 elementary schools – that students possess word fluency. It is for these reasons that all students at the end of their first-grade year should be able to demonstrate reading fluency rates between 100 and 115 words per minute. At the end of second grade, fluency rates should be between 135 and 150 words per minute. These levels are not difficult to achieve if the teacher singles out fluency word skills as a priority, and the use of the 1,000-word fluency program can achieve these proficiency levels – especially in the Title 1 elementary schools. The program is a free download at **New 3Rs Academic Reformation.** Again, it is a relatively easy task to achieve mastery of phonemic awareness of common sounds and decoding skills via a spaced repetition daily pedagogical medium.

The second stage of reading is heavily based on comprehension of text as well as the ever present assessed common literacy State standard (CCSS and TEKS) strands for vocabulary development, character analysis, inferences, summary, main idea, etc. The means to accomplish this task is to employ Guided Novel Instruction (GNI), weekly focus of specific literacy strands as well as accountable independent reading. The vast number of intermediate aged elementary students will not become lifelong readers if they are confined to reading short passages and answering related questions that access only standard-based literacy strands. Obviously, due to standardized test assessments, these

short comprehension passages must be employed to prepare students for not only the test format but provide sufficient practice in responding to those types of questions. However, it is the engagement of quality grade level novels that afford children to discover reading as an enjoyable endeavor in and of itself. Moreover, this process can apply all the literacy strands from State standards as well as apply the primary grade phonics and phonemic awareness skills until students read and comprehend with automaticity. Since students are engaged in GNI every day for at least 30 to 45 minutes, **the sheer volume and practice of reading practice** ensure all students secure grade level reading proficiency. The teacher is constantly interacting with students on specific skills in application when reading high-quality (student interest) chapter books/novels. Finally, as students discover novels as a form of entertainment, the accountable independent reading program sells itself to 80 to 90 percent of intermediate students. If there is accountability in the independent reading process in conjunction with GNI, a classroom teacher will discover that students consume reading novels on their own. Thus, the motivation factor and the related energy a teacher must expend need only be targeted for 10 to 20 percent of their students – a manageable number.

Note: The art of writing is _invariably_ the last literacy element to be mastered during the language acquisition process. The language acquisition process in order of development is consistently listening, speaking, reading and finally, writing. The core content of learning to write a language is interesting since it is the last element to be mastered, but ironically, it had to be invented **before** the reading part of a language could come into existence. Much like reading, students must practice writing a lot each day to master the skill. As always, students are not mastering a skill without practicing it to threshold levels.

There is a tremendous difference for many elementary students, especially low-income students, in orally pronouncing English words fluently versus spelling those same words correctly when writing a short narrative or writing responses to queries from a comprehension reading passage. However, if students can correctly spell many of the most basic English words with automaticity, they are much better able to logically sequence their sentences to convey intent, and their daily practice is not an endless teacher directed correction of misspellings of common English words. Instead, the teacher-student conversations are extended to much richer content areas of grammar, word choice, logical sequencing, compound sentences as well as employing differing sentence transitions of dependent clauses to vary sentence structure. There is a free curriculum (i.e., 800 word stop-gap non-negotiable program) at the website in the footer that will dramatically assist in students' mastering basic English word spellings.

3.) Science. Long-term mastery in science mirrors mathematics because both subjects rely on building specific skills, using technical vocabulary, and applying multiple interconnected concepts. For instance, students must possess thorough understanding of discrete science concepts/skills in energy forms – to apply those energy forms in a conservation of energy principle using, for instance, a real-world hydroelectric power dam. Then, it is easier to comprehend that water stored (i.e., potential energy) behind the dam falls vertically (i.e., kinetic energy) and rotates large metal turbines with magnets attached to produce an electric current. All aspects of these science processes must be learned discreetly and then combined in a simple example to fully understand the energy transitional process working in combination. Again, it is for this reason that mastery of science skills/concepts should be pedagogically approached like mathematics with dynamic spaced repetition instruction and active student engagement every day to achieve mastery level repetitions for all three (3) student groupings listed above. Finally, fifth grade fall and spring daily warm-ups are available for free download at the URL in the footer of this document. These warm-ups can be added to the daily spaced repetition session. As with mathematics, science vocabulary is non-contextual, students often cannot

rely on context clues to determine a word's meaning as they would in a standard literacy passage. To ensure comprehension, elementary teachers should provide a working definition alongside visual text and real-world examples for specialized terms such as metamorphic rock, electric circuit, potential energy, and photosynthesis.

Note: While standardized math and science assessments primarily rely on written questions, their typically short format means that students with reading difficulties can often still grasp the 'gist' of the content. Because these questions are significantly more condensed than standard literacy passages, reading stamina is rarely the primary barrier. However, for students who lack fluency in basic arithmetic, assessment stamina remains a significant challenge

Importance of Classroom Structure and Sequential Lesson Design in Student Performance

Social and academic performance is contingent on more than only skill and application practice via repetitions. There are a finite number of significant elements that influence efficacy in the classrooms, and unfortunately, classroom teachers and campus administrators must be cognizant of the importance of those factors to eliminate the achievement gap in Title 1 elementary and middle schools.

This text assumes educators and administrators already recognize that effective classroom management, efficient routines, and sequential lesson design are vital. These three pillars share a singular goal: creating an organizational structure that maximizes <u>student engagement</u> and <u>time-on-task</u>. In practice, high levels of teacher and administrator structure directly correlate with superior academic and social growth, while a lack of structure typically results in lower performance. Therefore, campus leaders should utilize fall professional development to prioritize and reinforce specific management techniques—such as proximity and clear expectations—and logistical routines like transitions and material distribution.

Lesson planning, or more aptly, **sequentially** planned skill lessons in many Tite 1 elementary and middle schools has become a lost art in the pedagogical craft. ***Why?*** I think this has occurred due to a series of events over the last 3 decades.

First, teachers are not trained to think in a logical framework in curricular content toward their lessons. They are being trained more in instructional mediums than attempts to lose focus on the root issue of low academic performance, such as small group guided math instruction. Since students have prior grade level academic gaps, instead of globally addressing the academic numeracy gaps via spaced repetition and Formative Loop, they employ small group guided math methodology during their math block which leaves many students not in the small group off task and ultimately produces poor overall academic performance.

Second, the educators' philosophy at the administrative and university level appear to acquiesce toward accepting poor results as the cost of doing business. They do not change their methodology when it has repeatedly proven to be ineffective. They appear to me that their ideological beliefs are more important than the results their philosophical beliefs actually produce.

Third, I also believe the rise of digital curricular resources in lieu of textbooks is a pivotal factor. Digital resources may save on printing paper, but it appears that efficacy is lost in classrooms that use them. It may also be due to the fact that the digital resources provide less tracking structure of the daily lessons. Again, less structure will always be associated with performance costs. Additionally, the use of digital standardized testing is another factor that hampers campus educators' instructional time. Teachers are placed in the unenviable

position of allocating a significant portion of class time providing practice on the testing medium. It is my belief that elementary literacy, mathematics and science standardized assessments should all be conducted with paper and pencil formats.

Fourth, teachers move on to the next lesson despite the fact that many of their students have not mastered prior daily lessons. They do not know how to dynamically spiral content, so students have sufficient repetitions to master the lesson. Their teaching philosophy for all pragmatic purposes evolves into, *"If the child gets it, they get it. If the child does not, they do not. Teacher moves on to the next lesson, regardless of their students understanding."*

Final Thoughts

We live in a world where a license is the gatekeeper to a good living. From engineering to electrical work, credentials are the currency of the modern workforce. Yet, we continue to see students graduating without the ability to read or do math at grade level. What happens to these children when they become adults? You can see the answer today in every grocery store, coffee shop, and strip mall. Without basic academic mastery, their earning potential is capped at service-level wages, essentially locking them out of the salaries associated with white color professional work and skilled trades.

The inherent complexities of classroom dynamics contribute to the challenge. Teachers must manage numerous moving parts, including daily routines and diverse student academic needs. This is particularly difficult in Title 1 schools where educators must address significant literacy and numeracy gaps while teaching new material. Failure to master grade-level content over years creates critical academic literacy and numeracy gaps that destroy student confidence and self-esteem.

Stagnant performance despite consistent effort points to a flawed methodology. In schools, when academic growth stalls, it is generally due to the lack of global systems to directly address academic gaps and pedagogical philosophy. If the current processes are not producing results, they are by definition, ineffective. Today's public-school teaching philosophy has devolved into a harmful "move-on" mentality: ***"If the student gets it, they get it. If not, the class moves on, and those children fall further behind."*** This practice ensures a third to more than half of all students are promoted without essential skills. This systemic failure has become an accepted, normalized standard for teachers, administrators, parents, and politicians over the last five decades.

Additionally, the two issues that must be overcome by classroom educators to initiate academic reformation, especially at a Title 1 campus, are the following: ***Prior and dependent grade level academic skill gaps, and the diverse make-up of three main student cognitive groupings that are present in all classrooms.*** Moreover, Tier 1 grade level curriculum assumes that there are not prior grade level academic gaps; however, even novice elementary or middle school teachers are aware that children have prior academic grade level gaps that adversely impact grade level learning. Consequently, an instructional and stop-gap curricular system must be established to deal with the academic gaps while simultaneously addressing the three main student groups that are omnipresent in a typical elementary and middle school classroom.

To improve student outcomes in core subjects, schools must stop looking at external excuses and start questioning their internal instructional philosophy. Campus administration must implement *what **does** work, not what they **philosophically want** to work.* To meet all the academic needs of all students in the classroom while simultaneously addressing prior grade level skill gaps, educators must seek effective pedagogical solutions like spaced repetition and global stop-gap curricular systems that address academic numeracy and literacy gaps. If not, expect the chronic academic performance in the public schools to continue, unabated.