

How to Improve Word Fluency and Heighten Reading Proficiency

*A Methodology that Dramatically Improves
Elementary School Literacy*

*A Detailed Analysis and Pragmatic Implementation of Two
Free Stop-Gap Curricular (Supplementary) Literacy
Resources Designed to Dramatically Increase Fluency and
Accelerate Students to Grade Level Reading Proficiency
– With Proven and Sustained Elementary Student Success*

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Executive Summary

This white paper focuses on two (2) stop-gap literacy *supplemental* resources (i.e. 1,000 Word Fluency and 800 Word Non-Negotiable Spelling Programs – both free downloads) – that rapidly accelerate students classified as economic disadvantaged to grade level word fluency levels. The paper provides a highly detailed analysis of two of the major factors adversely affecting grade level reading proficiency. It also provides specific implementation steps for both of these two (2) uniquely designed curricular resources. Both resources do not replace any aspect of the daily core curriculum, but they symbiotically supplement and support the adopted core curriculum, ensuring success for children struggling academically in reading.

Although these curricular stop-gap methodologies are generally used more often in Title 1 schools, they are also applicable to non-Title 1 elementary school students classified as either at-risk or economically disadvantaged who are struggling with reading proficiency. The comparably depressed academic outcomes of at-risk or economically disadvantaged students enrolled in high socioeconomic schools is due to the same academic literacy and numeracy skill gaps commonly exhibited by students with at-risk factors. Regardless of the geographical location, these academic skill gaps are overtly inconspicuous in an elementary school's standardized assessment report card. As standardized test results are released to the public beginning in third grade, students' academic skill gaps are manifested in the infamous achievement gap – an academic performance separation between children of poverty and their more affluent peers as measured by standardized testing outcomes. In a word, the achievement gap is actually an indirect measure of a students' academic literacy and numeracy skill gaps. Specifically, this document provides...

A.) *The WHY:*

- Word Fluency is an essential literacy component in heightening comprehension, vocabulary development and independent reading.
- Historically, an incongruence in English language word spelling versus oral pronunciation has evolved over the last 1,500 years. Furthermore, the cultural influences and English language word adoptions from other Indo-European languages present pedagogical challenges for elementary language arts teachers.
- The literacy word gap must be narrowed and eradicated using a systematic process for **EACH** student via direct intervention methodology and monitoring by both teachers and campus administrators. Thus, social justice is achieved.

B.) *The WHAT:*

- Two (FREE) supplemental literacy stop-gap resources with accompanying monitoring spreadsheets are available for download at the website URL located in the footer that efficiently and effectively address the three (3) issues stated above (i.e. *The Why:*).
- Both resources require only minutes a day, but consistent daily use as well as educator effort are compulsory to achieve high levels of reading proficiency success. When beginning the stop-gap programs, administrator assistance is frequently required.

C.) *The HOW:*

- Explicit methodology is provided so that each resource may be implemented with fidelity regardless of teacher experience levels. Related videos will also be produced so a visual understanding of the implementation and methodology is available for educator use.
- The specific methodologies annotated in this white paper is the “How” a number of Title 1 elementary schools consistently produce sustained reading performance outcomes greater than 90% on standardized state assessments.

In the typical Title 1 elementary school in this country, the majority of students possess literacy and academic skill gaps. This situation places Title 1 classroom teachers in a difficult instructional position. Since significant numbers of students attending Title 1 elementary schools lack prior grade level background knowledge (e.g. literacy word skill gaps), they are not successful with the daily lessons from the core curriculum. The core curriculum is grade level designed, and its basic premise is that students do NOT have prior grade level skill gaps. However, every seasoned Title 1 administrator and teacher knows that this is NOT the case – data indicates at-risk students possess academic skill gaps. The two (2) stop-gap supplemental and free downloadable resources presented in this document rectify these literacy issues and position students to be successful with grade level state standards and the adopted core curriculum.

In summary, these two (free downloads) stop-gap supplemental resources are effective for improving grade level reading proficiency for the following reasons:

- One stop-gap resource (800 word Non-Negotiable Word Program) directly addresses the historical development of the English language when oral pronunciation of words does not match its actual spelling (e.g. ‘tuff’ and ‘tough.’ The other stop-gap resource (1,000 Word Fluency Program) directly increases reading fluency rates. Both resources impact ALL students at the campus with expected and consistent monitoring and implementation.
- Both stop-gap resources are so simply designed that a novice teacher is as efficient and effective as a highly seasoned veteran educator on the same grade level. Thus, existing and newly hired school personnel are easily trained in both implementation and methodology.
- Both stop-gap programs require effort and consistency; however, the targeted intervention programs require and expend very little instructional time during a normal school day.
- The two stop-gap resources are designed to be symbiotic with each other, and they afford both a vertically and horizontally aligned literacy intervention program at an elementary campus.
- Both stop-gap resources rapidly accelerate students to grade level – filling academic gaps and allow the adopted core curriculum to function as it was designed. The stop-gap resources are effective for economically disadvantaged students and/or English Language Learners (ELs or ELLs) attending either Title 1 or non-Title 1 schools.
- The intervention process targets EACH student and readily affords a principal to establish and implement a *schoolwide system* that *directly* addresses two major obstacles in word fluency and ultimately, reading proficiency. Hence, the campus administrator possesses two intervention tools that not only address the students’ academic need but also support the principal to systemically organize and direct their teachers both efficiently and effectively.
- The methodologies are results-proven whereas Title 1 elementary schools academically compete with non-Title 1 elementary schools. In short, the achievement gap is dramatically narrowed, and when combined with implementation of a guided novel instruction (GNI) pedagogy and an accountable independent reading program, it is completely eradicated.

Implementing unique curricular stop-gap resources and training school personnel on their implementation has proven repeatedly to heighten and sustain academic performance. For any interested educator or stakeholder desiring a systematic, results-proven and empirical approach, this white paper provides a comprehensive view to proven Title 1 elementary school academic literacy turnaround. In general, it affords a ***common literacy solution to common academic inequities*** for at-risk or academically struggling students attending traditional or charter schools. However, in order for social justice and academic equity to become an existential reality, the principal and teachers must press resources that directly eradicate the literacy gaps.

How to Improve Word Fluency and Heighten Reading Proficiency

Word fluency is one of the five (5) pillars of reading instruction as prescribed by the 1997 National Reading Panel (NRP). The NRP was a government body established by Congress that stipulated the instruction of phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary development as its five recommendations for improving literacy outcomes for American public schools.

Almost a quarter century after the NRP's conclusions and recommendations, there has NOT been significant improvement in literacy rates in elementary schools – especially Title 1 elementary schools. In 2013, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) found that a high percentage of American schoolchildren could not read on grade level. *Their report indicated that reading test results demonstrate that far too many young people continue to read below grade level. Sixty five percent of all U.S. fourth graders scored “below proficient,” which means that they are not reading at grade level. Only 35 percent of fourth graders are reading at or above grade level. In addition, 64 percent of eighth graders are reading below grade level, whereas 36 percent are reading at or above grade level. ... In 1992, 72 percent of fourth graders and 71 percent of eighth graders were reading below grade level.* – U.S. Department of Education, “*The Nation’s Report Card*,” 2013.

The NAEP findings show that many primary aged students’ transition to the intermediate elementary grades (i.e. 3rd through 5th grades) unprepared for expected levels of grade level reading comprehension proficiency. In fact, many intermediate students attending Title 1 elementary schools possess significant deficit levels of word fluency; accordingly, instead of focusing on comprehension while reading, they expend tremendous mental energy struggling with the simultaneous challenges of decoding and fluidity. When students read printed text and they lack basic word fluency, they are unable to ascertain the literal comprehension of sentences only previously read. One of the main reasons that chronic reading proficiency issues remain unabated in American public schools is that word fluency has not been directly and systematically targeted and monitored for each student. Too many primary teachers provide sound balanced literacy practice as well as consistent phonics and phonemic awareness instruction; however, there is not an established, consistent, systematic individualized targeted process to ensure that EACH student possesses word fluency aligned with National Fluency Word Correct Per Minute (WCMPM) Norms.

Most elementary teachers quickly conclude that a student must possess high word fluency and decoding skills to increase comprehension. In addition, the teacher must help the student develop vocabulary and gain literacy stamina while instilling a love for reading. But, educators do not possess a systematic method in their classrooms or schools. The vast majority of children can be taught to read on grade level, but this instructional process cannot and will not be accomplished by pedagogical methodologies that have invariably proven unsuccessful for the last seven (7) decades. If a child does not possess word fluency and decoding skills, the probability of a proficient grade level reader is highly unlikely – as the literacy statistics from the “*The Nation’s Report Card – 2013*” bears out.

It is important that public school educators understand two major obstacles contributing to the struggle with basic reading competency. First, a brief but needed understanding of the development of the English language is an absolute necessity. The modern English language is a product of 1,500

years of many Indo-European cultural and language influences, and these historical rudiments present several unique challenges to contemporary language arts instruction. Second, for children of poverty, a literacy word gap exists. The actual size of this word gap is frequently debated by university academics, but it is a moot point from a school practitioner's point of view. The literacy word gap exists, and more importantly, it is above an existential threshold value. In short, the actual magnitude of the literacy word gap is irrelevant since it is sufficiently significant to affect literacy outcomes! If this literacy gap is not rectified and eradicated, the majority of students attending Title 1 elementary schools will NOT read on grade level.

This 'short' document presents a brief history of the evolution of the English language and its impact on oral pronunciation versus associated word spelling. It also discusses the literacy word gap, and its effect on children's grade level reading proficiency. It provides a pragmatic methodology using two literacy stop-gap resources that directly address both the word gap and word spelling versus oral pronunciation challenges so the mass of students enrolled in public elementary schools can achieve grade level nationally accepted fluency rate (Word per Minute) norms. Thus, as students leave elementary school and transition to middle school, they do so as level proficient readers. Finally, word fluency is essential for reading proficiency in any academic language; however, this short analysis focuses only on English language literacy.

PART ONE

The English Language – Origin and History at a 40,000 Foot View

Out of an estimated 6,000 languages in the world today, English is one of two languages most frequently spoken – Mandarin being the other. English is an Indo-European, Germanic based language with origins in the mid-5th century as the Jutes, Frisians, Angles and Saxons from Denmark and northern Germany settled in the British Isles. This era of the English language is commonly referred to as Old English, but in print, it looks more like German than modern day English. Old English is similar to modern day Spanish, Italian, Turkish and Finnish in that it was written as it was spoken; consequently, a professional linguist can both read and correctly spell words from the surviving Old English writings with relative ease once they are proficient with its phonetic code.

Many people may believe that modern English derives its origins from a Romance Language (e.g. Latin, French, Italian and Spanish) since there are so many borrowed English words from those other Indo-European languages. But, it is not. It is a Germanic based language as can be determined from its grammar constructions, verb cases and pronouns. In fact, 80% the most commonly used 1,000 English words uttered today possess Germanic origins, and the remaining 20% are borrowed from mostly Romance Languages. However, in the next second 1,000 most common English words, Germanic based words comprise only 40% of the most frequently used English words; whereas, the other 60% of words originate mostly from other Indo-European languages. This etymological flip in word frequency indicates the contribution and influence from non-Germanic, Indo-European languages over the last 1,500 years.

However, it is important to note that the Celtic influence and Viking invasion of England also did much to alter the grammatization of the English language between 600 and 1,000 A.D. Those social and cultural processes stripped English of many of the grammatical complexities commonly associated with other Indo-European languages but uniquely from its Germanic source language as well.

English word spellings versus oral pronunciations incongruence – A Brief History!

All languages change and evolve over time to varying degrees. These changes may be slight in the manner of word pronunciation where the first syllable of a word is stressed instead of the second. For instance, the word ‘balcony’ is a borrowed word from Italian. Originally, its pronunciation stressed the second syllable ‘cony,’ but the present day pronunciation of the word stresses the first syllable ‘bal.’ One of the major influences of English word usage occurred after the Norman invasion of modern day England in 1066. The French had a profound change on the Old English language, and Middle English was born. Interestingly, the French occupation for about 150 years did not appreciably alter the grammar of English. However, a large number of French words poured into the English language, and many commonly used words today like ‘easy, air, certain, food, foreign, dress, sign, large, difficult, study, familiar and exercise’ were subsequently added to the language. Linguists estimate that as many as 7,500 French borrowings still exist today in common English vocabulary. Due to this large volume of French adoptions, the spelling of these words with respect to their pronunciations continued to evolve over the next two to three hundred years.

A major shift in the (written) spelling of words compared to oral pronunciation occurred during a period known as ‘The Great Vowel Shift.’ This period occurred over about 150 years during the 14th and 15th century, and it led to many radical spelling convention of modern English. For instance, as the vowel sound shifted from short ‘a’ to long ‘a’ the ending ‘e’ became silent as in the word ‘made’ or similarly, ‘wif’ to ‘wife’ – further complicating oral pronunciation from its written form for many common words. Many other common English words like ‘hus’ and ‘mus’ (for example) transitioned to more modern day challenging spellings of ‘house’ and ‘mouse.’

Another area of major pronunciation to print change was during the Renaissance – a period of rebirth. The English language inherited many, many words from Latin and Greek at this time. Latin was deemed the language of learning (i.e. an accepted lingua franca of written text during that time period); thus, many words entered the English language via written text and documents. This massive influx of words brought with it many common words still in use today: adapt, appropriate, debt, doubt and education. In fact, the mysteriously silent ‘b’ in the spelling of debt and doubt make perfect sense when their original Latin roots are revealed – *debitum* and *dubitare*. The silent ‘c’ in the word “indict” has similar Latin beginnings, as it was originally *indictare*. Thus, consonants remained in English words from the original Latin root despite the fact that the letter(s) became silent when orally pronounced. However, sometimes letters were added to the English word when borrowed from Latin and French such as the *gh* in ‘delight,’ or the *gn* in foreign. Finally, Greek – also an Indo-European language – has contributed a mass of common words over time to the modern English vocabulary. For example, school, system, center, diet, kudo, and dilemma are all common English words with Greek origins.

The history of the English language is one of diverse influences and borrowings from different Indo-European languages as well as other languages. In general, its varied history of origin and adoption inserts challenges in our elementary school language arts classes as well as language acquisition difficulties for non-native speakers. In elementary classrooms, primary teachers should be aware of historical changes to prepare students for phonics lessons and phonemic awareness issues that may arise due to the conflict between the way a word is spoken and the way it is written. This can be a linguistic trouble area for both non-native and native speakers alike.

As noted, English is not a pure phonetic language, so written word spellings are frequently notably different from their oral pronunciations. At this point in time, there is no ‘turning the clock back’ to fix the historical evolution of the English language, so the historicity of English words often presents ‘tuff’ word challenges for Title 1 elementary language arts teachers. Currently, the adoption of new words into English from outside influences has dramatically slowed. Approximately 90% of new English words created today are adapted from within the language; consequently, there is more stability of the English language from ‘additional’ borrowed words from external language sources than any time in the past 1,500 years.

PART TWO

Two Pedagogical Reading Proficiency Hurdles:

English Language Pronunciation/Spelling Incongruence and Academic Word Gap

In the 16th through the 19th centuries, English began evolving as an accepted lingua franca written language in both the British Isles and their colonial imperial expansions around the world. The complicated English word spellings versus their pronunciations are remnants of a language in flux over the last millennium, and to this day, make English language acquisition more difficult than it should be for young schoolchildren. Thus, elementary school teachers contend with pedagogical mastery of challenging word spellings with these students each school year. In fact, professional linguists estimate that 25% of the modern English words do not follow a specific rule, and 3% are so irregularly spelled that their spellings must be memorized by rote. Fortunately, many of the word spelling challenges (versus pronunciation) primarily materialize in the first one to two thousand of the most frequently used English words.

It is important to note that in Prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms, teachers generally focus on ‘invented spelling’ methodologies to focus on the sounds of many of the words at that age. For example, in kindergarten, if a student attempts to spell the word ‘school’ – and the student spells the word correctly by its sounds – such as: ‘skul’ or ‘scool’ – that is perfectly acceptable at that developmental age. However, as the student progresses to first grade and subsequent grades, children should learn correct, standardized spellings for English words despite inconsistent oral pronunciations. Of course, these differences in word spellings versus pronunciation are also critical because of their influence on reading fluency. Students may orally pronounce a word correctly, but not necessarily recognize it in print form.

The vast majority of children classified as economically disadvantaged and/or an English Language Learner (ELs or ELLs) enroll in prekindergarten or kindergarten with a literacy word gap. There has been much debate over the size of the literacy word gap. Some academics have placed the difference for the word gap around 30 million words, whereas others cite a significantly lower academic word gap difference. One important aspect of this dispute from either academics or campus Title 1 educators is that a literacy word gap exists for children of poverty upon their enrollment in the public schools. Another principal factor concerning the magnitude of the literacy word gap is that it is merely an academic debate and not an existential debate. If the literacy word gap is not directly addressed and eradicated, reading proficiency will be adversely affected, and predictably, the achievement gap widens with each increasing grade level.

Again, regardless of the actual word gap magnitude, it is at threshold value and significantly influences fluency rates. Thus, in a Title 1 elementary school with a medium to high percentage of economically disadvantaged students, the word gap is an existential reality that must be directly addressed. If it is not, then the woeful grade level proficiency reading percentages cited in the “The Nation’s Report Card – 2013” conducted by the US Department of Education will undoubtedly continue. Also important to note is that similarly classified students attending non-Title 1 elementary schools should be provided targeted intervention to ensure that they also achieve grade level reading proficiency. In short, it does not matter geographically where economically disadvantaged students, ELLs or at-risk children attend public school; endemically, they possess an academic fluency need that requires systematic, direct and targeted intervention.

Improving fluency rates has been more difficult for primary and intermediate aged students in Title 1 elementary schools. National Normed Fluency rates of a 90% Spring/End of Year (EOY) percentile for first and second graders are 111 and 142 words per minutes, respectively. Fluency rates for different grade levels are listed in the Table of National Oral Reading Fluency Norms below. Invariably, when the author of this fluency paper has discussed fluency rates with first grade teachers working in Title 1 elementary schools, the teachers have provided accepted fluency rates of their students for Spring/EOY at the 50 percent level or about 50 to 60 words per minute. Unfortunately, too many primary first grade educators have lowered the fluency expectations in their classrooms due to both the historical idiosyncrasies of a hybrid language like English and the significant impact of the literacy word gap. Since primary teachers are not trained with efficient and effective methodologies to pragmatically press fluency directly, all too often, Title 1 students complete first grade with lower fluency expectations from their teachers, and they do not catch-up without highly targeted assistance from that point forward.

Table of National Oral Reading Fluency Norms									
Grade	Percentile	Fall**	Winter**	Spring**	Grade	Percentile	Fall**	Winter**	Spring**
1	90		81	111	5	90	166	182	194
	75		47	82		75	139	156	168
	50		23	53		50	110	127	139
2	90	106	125	142	6	90	177	195	204
	75	79	100	117		75	153	167	177
	50	51	72	89		50	127	140	150
3	90	128	146	162	7	90	180	192	202
	75	99	120	137		75	156	165	177
	50	71	92	107		50	128	136	150
4	90	145	166	180	8	90	185	199	199
	75	119	139	152		75	161	173	177
	50	94	112	123		50	133	146	151

** WCPM = Words Correct Per Minute

Why is Word Fluency So Important in Reading?

Fluency in any human endeavor indicates automaticity. Automaticity means humans can perform many tasks without using extensive mental energy because of the familiarity aspect associated

with the task. For instance, driving a car for the vast majority of adults is one of automaticity. They are not thinking and concentrating incessantly on turning the steering wheel or driving in their traffic lane. We steer the car and signal lane changes without conscious thought while simultaneously processing a multitude of dynamic information that centers in and surrounding our own vehicle. Another example is math numeracy. The importance of automaticity imbedded in math numeracy is analogous to word fluency in reading in its scope and effect. Students that thoroughly master arithmetic math processing skills as well as the four math fact operations much more easily comprehend dependent algebraic operations in middle school. Students that are not fluent or possess automaticity in literacy read sentences so slowly – dissecting each word with such concentration that by the time they reach the end of the sentence, they are unable to state the literal meaning of the text they just read. In short, word fluency is critical to the ultimate goal of reading, which is comprehension.

The key to reading fluency in any language is the automaticity of the first 1,000 most common words in the English language. Statistical frequency analysis has determined that mastery of the first 1,000 words yields approximately 72% word recognition for adult level reading material. Thus, with only mastery of one thousand of the most common words, an adult must concentrate only on 28% of the words in any standard adult texts. ***However, for third graders, the word frequency leaps to approximately 86 to 90% for vetted grade level passages for the first 1,000 most common English words.*** Thus, with only 1,000 of the most common and frequently used English words mastered to automaticity, a third grade student is able to become functionally fluent affording language arts teachers to focus their instruction on comprehension reading techniques and literary content interests (e.g. foreshadowing, character analysis, main idea, inferences, summary, fact, opinion, etc.). It is of paramount importance to recognize the implications of third grade fluency mastery. If a student is a proficient grade level reader by the EOY in third grade, a well-designed, consistently implemented vertically aligned language arts program all but guarantees that an EOY fifth grader will transition to middle school reading on grade level.

Fluency is also important for vocabulary development – another one of the five pillars of the 1997 National Reading Panel’s recommendation to increase literacy outcomes for American schoolchildren. If students have mastered the automaticity of reading for the most common English words, then it is much less demanding to learn and retain new vocabulary words on a weekly basis. Teachers are much more prepared to explore word etymologies and relate that word to synonyms or antonyms. For instance, the word ‘authentic’ means genuine or original. The elementary student may learn three new words in context with a consistent and weekly vocabulary program – not only the defined word “authentic.” The teacher can employ antonyms of the defined word (e.g. authentic) to learn more related words to the defined word like ‘disingenuous’ and ‘manufactured.’ Again, learning several new words all associated with one new word, “authentic.” The paramount point of word mastery is that the student is a fluent reader within the context of basic and the most commonly used English words – freeing their mental capacity for both comprehension purposes and learning new vocabulary words.

With the implementation of a structured phonics and phonemic awareness program, primary aged children readily can master the sounds of many basic vowels, consonants, blends, digraphs, etc. This early literacy work in language decoding and sound recognition is pivotal to embryonic word attack strategies as well as heightening word fluency proficiency in later grades. However, improving

fluency rates for children cannot occur happenstance – there must be an aggressive pedagogical method to ensure EACH child possesses word fluency.

As noted above, word fluency automaticity is key for dramatically improving comprehension reading proficiency – which is one of most influential factors comprising the infamous achievement gap in literacy. Furthermore, if a student is not fluent, they struggle to read effortlessly, and equally importantly, children do not discover and form the habit and love of life long reading. In fact, if they are not adept at reading, it is highly probable they will attempt to avoid the endeavor. It has been the author’s lifetime and professional experience that the vast majority of children and adults possess tendencies to avoid activities in which they lack proficiency.

PART THREE

Fixing Below Grade Level Reading Proficiency

“A Systematic and Targeted Intervention Process Based on Students’ Academic Needs”

Improving fluency rates has been more difficult for students enrolled in Title 1 elementary schools than their more affluent peers. National Normed Fluency rates shown in the table above cite fluency rates per grade level for three different times during a typical school year. These recommended fluency rates can be achieved by 90 to 95 percent of all students attending the most challenging Title 1 elementary schools using a simple, but efficient and effective supplemental ELA program. However, these supplemental programs must address two of the major impediments that ELA classroom teachers face. The supplemental program must overcome the following two literacy hurdles:

- 1.) The historicity and evolution of the English Language that has developed difficult word spellings relative to their oral pronunciations.
- 2.) The existential and material word gap that children of poverty and/or English Language Learners possess at the time they matriculate in public schools.

These two conditions are addressed and eradicated via the implementation of two **FREE** symbiotic supplemental ELA stop-gap programs. The programs naturally provide both a horizontal and vertically aligned schoolwide methodology. ***The spelling versus pronunciation incongruence issues are handled by the 800-word nonnegotiable spelling program and the word gap is addressed with the 1,000-word fluency program.*** Both programs afford targeted intervention for every student on the campus; thus, positioning each student for academic grade level readiness in both reading comprehension as well as establishing basic spelling structure and fomenting rudimentary writing skills. Every child is accountable and it is possible that no student escape the monitoring and intervention attention of a classroom teacher and an actively engaged administrator. Again, these two stop-gap word programs are simple and symbiotic in their design, and an entry-level teacher possesses the same efficacy as a seasoned colleague. Thus, teacher inexperience is not a factor when the programs are properly implemented. Both ELA supplemental programs are *free downloads* at the website referenced in the footer.

Prior to describing each of these supplemental ELA programs in detail, it is important to note that phonics, phonemic awareness and balanced literacy daily lessons are essential. Daily instruction of those programs continue unabated with the inclusion of both stop-gap supplementary word programs. As noted, children of poverty are reading at lower levels of proficiency in third grade and with each succeeding grade level than students not of poverty. These two ELA supplemental stop-gap

programs assist in eradicating the gap and allow the adopted core ELA curriculum to function as it was designed eliminating intermediate classrooms with children reading one and two years behind.

*800 Word Non-Negotiable Spelling Supplemental (Stop-Gap) Program
Pragmatic Implementation*

There are two versions of this program – one for first grade only and the other for second through sixth grade. Both programs are free downloads at the website address provided in the footer of this document. The first grade program is simple – five (5) words per week and the students apply basic understanding and meaning of each word by using it in a simple sentence. The implementation tips below are for the 800 word spelling program – second through sixth grade version, and it has two options: with and without daily activities. The 800 word supplemental ELA program rectifies the oral pronunciation and spelling inconsistencies that have developed over the last 1500 years from the tremendous number of word adoptions, Indo-European cultural influences and general evolution of the English language.

The pragmatic implementation of the 800 English word Non-Negotiable Spelling stop-gap literacy program is by design, straight-forward; however, the specific steps listed below should assist teachers in both the efficient and effective use of the program. A key aim in using any curricular process is both consistency and student accountability that guarantees and ensures student success each week. The recommendations below are created for regular education students. However, for any student receiving special education services, the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a legal document that must be consulted and followed with the utmost stringency. It is important to note that these pragmatic recommendations be modified under those or any other special student circumstances or needs.

Both the fluency and the non-negotiable supplemental word programs are comprised of the same exact words – at least for the first 800 words. However, each program has a symbiotic effect on the other as well as serves both literacy elements of reading and writing. As seasoned educators are aware, the literacy process of reading a language is invariably mastered before writing is functionally mastered, but the symbiotic process of learning both concurrently is highly beneficial. It is common that the contextual meaning of a word may be ascertained during verbal communication, and it is common for elementary schoolchildren to encounter that same word in print, but not recognize it. Thus, the psychomotor learning of writing not only triggers long-term memory functionality – but it helps ingrain the correct spelling of a word relative to its oral pronunciation. For example, the word “rough” may be contextually understood during conversation, but it is difficult to spell correctly based solely on an oral utterance. A child must view the word ‘rough’ in print to realize it is a word for which they possess prior familiarity. It is important to note that when word spellings, pronunciation and fluency issues are rectified for all children in a classroom setting using these supplemental ELA stop-gap programs, an educator has provided a baseline of rudimentary knowledge to all their students. Hence, the teacher’s pedagogical task of instruction in either reading or writing core content is greatly simplified since all students in their classroom possess ‘expected’ and prerequisite grade level knowledge.

Non-Negotiable 800 English Word Program – Pragmatic Recommendations/Implementation

- 1.) Select the literacy stop-gap Non-Negotiable English Word resource type: 1st grade version, 2nd – 6th grade English Word Program or the 2nd – 6th grade English Word Program with Spelling Activities. Download the literacy stop-gap programs and read the enclosed introduction and recommendations.
- 2.) It is highly recommended that each student possess his or her own *spirally bound copy* of the 800 English Word Program. The front and back covers of the student copy should be durable 60 to 65 bond weight paper. If each student possesses their own copy, the classroom teacher is not required to make Xerox copies each week, and there is a time-saving efficiency aspect in daily classroom routines of using the program. A spiral bound copy also provides campus educators with a running record of program use. Finally, it is often less expensive to use a local printing vendor or a school district Xerox service than to use a school copier on booklet printing.
- 3.) The classroom teacher should model for students his or her expectations in the manner that each weekly twenty-five (25) word list is to be approached. It is recommended to instruct students to write each word horizontally (Not Vertically!) five (5) times. As the students writes each word, horizontally, they should say the word quietly to themselves and think the word. Finally, the student should use one hand to COVER the written/completed word(s); thus, the student is not just copying the word, but thinking each time how the word is correctly spelled.
- 4.) Students should practice each word list independently and a quick weekly assessment can be given each Friday morning. Student Performance Expectations: 24 – 25 words spelled correctly (Green), 22 – 23 words spelled correctly (Yellow) and less than 22 words spelled correctly (Red). If students are scoring in the “Red” range, those students require more practice each week, not less!
- 5.) Complete the classroom ‘Monitoring XLS Spreadsheet’ – free download at website address provided in the footer of this document. Email to the campus administration on Friday afternoon. Follow-up with specific students that are struggling, so ALL children are successful. Motivation, active monitoring and targeted intervention are paramount to student success.
- 6.) Specific Steps to Ensure and Guarantee Heightened Student Performance Each Week:
 - a.) After Friday’s weekly test, it is recommended that the teacher present the first five (5) words of the next week’s twenty-five (25) words. During transition between lessons on Friday, the teacher can require students to number a paper from 1 to 5. Then, the teacher can proctor ad hoc five-word formative assessment(s) on the first five (5) words of the next week’s word list. In doing so, the first five (5) words of next week’s list are introduced and ingrained.
 - b.) On Monday, the beginning of the new week, the teacher repeats this pattern, but the quick ad-hoc assessments are the first ten (10) words – *cumulatively*. Students complete word practice in his or her *spirally bound* words for the first 10 words on the list.
 - c.) On Tuesday, the teacher repeats the pattern, but adds five (5) additional words. Quick assessments are given during transition times for fifteen (15) words, *cumulatively*. Students complete word practice in his or her *spirally bound* words for the first 15 words on the list.
 - d.) On Wednesday, the teacher repeats the pattern and adds five (5) more words to bring the total to twenty (20) of the twenty-five (25) total weekly words, *cumulatively*. Again, students complete the next 5 words in his or her spiral. Any available paper may be flipped and numbered to twenty (20). This process assures the students are ready for Friday’s test.

Non-Negotiable 800 English Word Program – Pragmatic Recommendations/Implementation

- e.) **On Thursday, the teacher assesses all 25 words in a quick pretest. It is highly recommended that the teacher use the test as a diagnostic for each student. After the test, the teacher stresses to students that they concentrate and focus on the words that they are NOT spelling correctly. The teacher emphasizes that each student practice those specific words spelled incorrectly that night in preparation for the following Friday test day. If not, elementary students will practice ALL the words and not focus on the specific words that are spelled incorrectly.**
- f.) **If a regular education student is not performing well, it is recommended that the teacher question the student on why he or she believes that they are not doing well. Often, an intermediate elementary aged student will know the reason. The teacher can also ask the student, “How can I help you do better on these spelling tests?” The teacher and student can develop a collaborative plan to guide and improve the child’s academic preparation and performance.**
- 7.) **Final Note: To permit or ignore a student’s poor performance on these basic and fundamental word skills allows the social and academic inequity in public education to continue. These skills directly and significantly impact students’ writing (and reading) ability. The student must have strong fundamental language skills or subsequent grade level classroom teachers will not inherit incoming students with an established language foundation. Finally, without securing these rudimentary word skills, there is absolute certitude that student performance on standardized reading/writing or writing assessments administered in both elementary and middle school will be adversely affected. A student unable to demonstrate command of the most rudimentary English words does not possess a literacy base to develop both simple and tertiary sentence structures or to improve and heighten academic vocabulary.**

1,000 Word Fluency Supplemental (Stop-Gap) Program Pragmatic Implementation

The pragmatic implementation of the 1,000 English word fluency stop-gap literacy program is also a simple, straightforward and common sense implementation process. As with the 800 Non-Negotiable Word Program, the key point in the curricular process with the program is to guarantee and ensure student success each week until the program is completed for ALL students – ensuring word fluency. As noted prior, all children are positively affected since there is targeted intervention; however, any Individualized Education Plan (IEP) of any students receiving Special Education Services must always be consulted and legally followed. The recommendations listed in the pragmatic implementation should be appropriately modified for any special student circumstances.

As students successfully complete each 100-word list (10 total for a 1,000 words), their ability to read fluently will increase dramatically. However, there must be application of word fluency skills via guided and independent reading practice. One of the most effective intermediate guided reading applications is an authentic novel process called Guided Reading Instruction (GNI) – available for download at the website address in the footer. For the independent reading application, it is highly suggested that a classroom or schoolwide independent reading program focus on nightly *page* limits (e.g. 25 pages per night) appropriate for each grade level, and **not** traditional via nightly *time* limits (e.g. 30 minutes per night). A document template that assists teachers to track each students’ nightly

page limits is also available for free download. The comprehension aspect of the independent reading program may be digitally tracked via myON, Accelerated Reader, Reading Counts or a similar digital reading accountability program. Finally, it is the author's professional opinion that struggling readers will not possess comprehension and enlarge their vocabulary bases without automaticity in word fluency. Simply put, the child's mental CPU is depleted solely on deciphering the most frequent English words, and they are unable to focus and comprehend the literal meaning of the text.

1,000 English Word Fluency Program – Pragmatic Recommendations/Implementation

- 1.) Select the literacy stop-gap fluency resource type: Kindergarten version or 1st – 6th grade English Word Fluency Program. Download the literacy stop-gap programs and read the enclosed introduction and recommendations.**
- 2.) It is highly recommended that every 1st through 6th grade student possess his or her own fluency folder. Each 100 word list should be color coded for easy recognition. If a durable plastic folder with brads is used, it is possible to reuse folders for multiple school years. Finally, a different color may be selected for each grade level. In the event a student's folder is lost, the grade level is readily identified so the folder may be returned.**
- 3.) The school administration should consider purchasing five (5) quality Smart Pal ® dry sleeves plastic/transparent insert folders for each classroom teacher. This resource allows a teacher to place *two (2) – one hundred (100) word lists* back-to-back in each dry sleeves folder to facilitate efficiency when assessing students.**
- 4.) The teacher should set-up a consistent time of the day to assess students. For the primary grades (kindergarten through 2nd grade), an efficient means to accomplish weekly testing is to divide the class into 4 or 5 groups. For example, if there are twenty (20) students in a typical classroom, the teacher can divide a class into five (5) groups (i.e. a Monday Group, a Tuesday Group, a Wednesday Group, etc.) of four (4) children each. Any experienced-level teacher can easily manage to assess four (4) children each day on the group's 'testing' day. Tip: If there is a Monday Group, place highly reliable or the highest academic students in that group due to the two-day weekend break. Finally, the teacher should remind each group of children at dismissal the day before that his or her assessment is the following day/tomorrow.**
- 5.) For primary-aged elementary students and immigrant (ELL) students, it is beneficial to globally review the *100 list of words*, so students are familiar with the correct oral pronunciation of each word. On the website provided in the footer of this document, there are free audio file downloads of all *ten (10) – 100 word lists*. *These digital files are designed so each word is visually displayed as it is verbally pronounced.* The word files may be used for a daily center rotation or if students have access to a home computer, the words may be copied to a one gig memory stick and students can practice at home. Tip: If a primary student has an older sibling, the teacher can enlist the older sibling to assist their younger brother or sister in nightly practice.**
- 6.) When assessing students, it is recommended that a Xeroxed paper copy of the 'Monitoring XLS Spreadsheet' be marked to temporarily record the child's performance. The digital version of the spreadsheet may be updated at a convenient time and the document emailed to the campus administration each Friday afternoon. Template available for free download at the same website.**
- 7.) When initially assessing students, it is NOT recommended to skip around the 100 word sheet. There are four (4) columns of twenty-five (25) words per column. It is recommended that the teacher proceed vertically on the first column when assessing students. Initially, the teacher should NOT skip around. Students require consistent repetition to learn the high frequency words. The teacher should mark specific words on the student's fluency folder list that are**

1,000 English Word Fluency Program – Pragmatic Recommendations/Implementation

mispronounced, so the child is aware to practice those specific words during independent practice. Additionally, before beginning the assessment, the teacher should quickly review each student's fluency folder to review any words with which the student previously demonstrated unfamiliarity. There are recommended **Fall Semester** fluency times – words per minute – to complete a list per grade level in the Stop-Gap Program directions of the downloaded document. These times are less stringent than the **Spring Semester** national fluency rates listed below in Table of National Oral Reading Fluency Norms. The fluency program implementation during the fall semester presses formative readiness for the core curriculum at that point in the school year. However, with effective and accountable classroom lessons in balanced literacy, novel studies and independent reading throughout the school year, students become much more fluent readers by April and May. Adjust fluency times as needed for special student circumstances.

- 8.) If a student is making many errors on a word list assessment, it is recommended the classroom teacher parse the 100 word list into a column approach – 25 words at a time. The 'Monitoring XLS Spreadsheet' may be updated via a code to alert the administrator (i.e. P2 means Pink – 2nd column, whereas Pink is the color of sheet of the first 100 hundred words). The teacher may use twenty-five (25) word *cumulative* assessments (i.e. review previously completed columns each time the student is tested) until the student can complete the entire one hundred (100) word list.
- 9.) After a student completes a one-hundred (100) word list, the teacher should randomly 'spot-check' the student to ensure he or she knows the words regardless of the order of the words on the 100 word list. It is recommended that the teacher reverse the vertical order on the columns as they 'quiz or spot-check' students, and the teacher should randomly ask a student to pronounce words selected anywhere on the word list. If the student cannot correctly pronounce words that are randomly selected, then it implies the student does-NOT know the words. The teacher should begin the word list afresh and ensure the student can recite the list in either word column direction during the fluency assessments. Note: The student MUST know the words correctly to pass the assessment in a specified amount of time.
- 10.) TEACHER TIPS to facilitate ease of Implementation of the Fluency Program are listed below.
 - a.) Train a parent volunteer(s) to assist in assessing students each week. It is highly recommended that the teacher be specific in their training to ensure quality controls of student assessments, and that the parent(s) is reliable to consistently show-up at the designated class time. An official criminal background check of any volunteer should be conducted in compliance with state, school or district policies to ensure student safety at all times. TIP: Assessing a student group first thing in the morning while the other students complete an independent activity is a highly efficient and effective classroom routine. Note: Use students who have completed the task to assist other classmates who have not yet finished – Mini-Teachers.
 - b.) For students that rapidly reach the 6th and 7th hundred (100) word list levels, the teacher should focus and press those students to complete the 1,000 Fluency Word Program in its entirety as quickly as possible. Then, there will be more time to focus on the remaining students, and there are not as many students to track and schedule assessments each week.
 - c.) For students in the fourth (4th) through sixth (6th) grades, the teacher can check their standardized test scores from the previous school year. In this situation, if the student scored a seventy-five (75%) or higher on a *timed* State reading assessment, then that student may not need to complete the fluency program for they have proven they are a fluent reader under test conditions in the prior grade. However, if the student was tested in a non-English language, that student should complete the fluency program to ensure that a student classified as an English Language Learner (ELL) is fluent and proficient in English.

1,000 English Word Fluency Program – Pragmatic Recommendations/Implementation

- d.) When students are not progressing, the teacher must spend MORE time with the child – not less. The principal should be monitoring the bottom third to half of the class to ensure that ALL students are progressing. If this is not done, only a fraction of the students in the class will be fluent. The author calls this phenomenon the Title 1 ‘Fortunate Son’ effect.**
- e.) It is recommended to press first graders to complete ALL ten lists (1,000 words). Thus, when the students begin in the next grade the following year, they rapidly complete all the lists and ingrain the words into long-term memory in two school years.**
- f.) Celebrate student successes with recognitions! When a student finishes his or her hundred word list in kindergarten, first or second grade, acknowledge student accomplishments with stickers, buttons and school assemblies. Students need to know their efforts are recognized.**

Why Reading Proficiency at Title 1 Campuses Continues to Remain Chronically Low

Reading (word) fluency directly impacts a child’s ability to comprehend the implicit and explicit meaning in a novel or reading passage. Furthermore, the student’s reading prowess dramatically influences a child’s affinity for literature. It is a paramount factor in a child’s educational success throughout both elementary and secondary school. Few educators, if any, would disagree with this synopsis.

If the above statements are true, why do reading proficiency issues remain unabated school year after school? If these free 800 and 1,000 word supplemental programs are efficient and effective, why do Title 1 elementary schools continue to perform poorly – despite implementation? Is there something inherent in American Title 1 schools, or the children that attend those schools? The short answer is, “No!” It is not the children or a lack of desire to learn. In fact, the opposite is true for the children. They are thirsty for social and academic success, and educators have not pressed them using a methodology that positions students for performance readiness.

Main Reasons for Chronic Fluency and Reading Proficiency Failures in Title 1 Elementary Schools

The main issue is the elementary principals’ inability to focus on the essential academic priorities and remain instructionally committed and consistent in addressing the focal issues described in this white paper. The mass of these elementary principals are physical plant managers, and not instructional change agents or transformative instructional leaders at their campuses. They do not lead their teachers to success for many typical and common reasons. Some of these causes are listed below and further expound on the continued reading proficiency failures in the vast majority of this countries’ Title 1 elementary schools.

- 1.) The elementary principal does not establish fluency as a priority – and there is not a consistent horizontal or vertically aligned schoolwide program.
- 2.) The principal initiates the fluency and non-negotiable word supplemental stop-gap programs but does not monitor or champion it. The teachers recognize that the programs are not valued or a priority for the campus administration, and there is inconsistent horizontal or vertical use.

- 3.) The principal does not know what is important and what is not in order to academically transform a Title 1 campus. Thus, they are susceptible to employing a slew of competing curriculum philosophies and fads at their campus.
- 4.) The principal permits teachers to adopt a ‘Fortunate Son’ student learning philosophy, “*If the students gets it, they get it. If they don’t, they don’t.*” Thus, failure occurs when the principal does not **implement or actively monitor a systematic targeted intervention process for each student** as described in this document. When this situation occurs, the principal and teachers normalize failure and acquiesce academic performance to approximately half to 60% of their students competently passing vetted standardized reading tests. **Note:** When using this methodology presented in this paper, **press ALL students in the classroom** – in lieu of ignoring the relatively large of students that must be provided more encouragement and targeted intervention. In a word, when a student is struggling using these stop-gap resources, they need more assistance, not less. The monitoring spreadsheet available for free download will immediately identify those specific students.
- 5.) The principal is not detailed oriented and possesses poor organizational skills to successfully implement and monitor a schoolwide program.
- 6.) The principal does not comprehend the importance of primary grade phonics, phonemic awareness programs as well as fluency standards and the eventual impact of those literacy elements on reading and writing outcomes in the intermediate grades. For instance, the elementary principal’s educational experience is in non-primary grades, and he or she does not grasp the importance and dynamics of early childhood and emergent reading structures.
- 7.) The principal adheres to conventional reading and writing philosophies that have not produced heightened student literacy outcomes over the last 70 years. Furthermore, the principal does not understand that the adopted grade level curriculum assumes no gaps – and the majority of at-risk students possess prior grade level academic gaps.
- 8.) The elementary principal does not implement a fundamentally sound and academically directed instructional system and in not doing so, allows classroom teaching to evolve into a chaotic instructional environment with little to no central control, alignment or structure.
- 9.) The elementary principal believes in the isolation versus contextual critique for ALL student learning. Many educators believe that all learning must occur in context without isolation of skills, and to be fair, this argument is true for many skills and applications of student learning. However, these two stop-gap literacy program afford students the opportunity to ingrain specific words to assist them with background knowledge required in parallel contextual literacy learning – guided and independent reading. Furthermore, the teacher should also review the fluency word lists with their students and provides contextual examples as expected to provide deeper perspective. For example, a teacher may use new words from a list in a sentence and offer elicited examples of when they’ve heard/used the word as well as afford rudimentary word analysis to expound on patterns from previous lists (e.g. “enough” from a previous word list, the teacher may discuss how “rough” and “tough” all have the same pattern). In a word, the teacher should focus and relate words to prior knowledge so all students are aware of subtle word patterns. Finally, the teacher should be cognizant of specific words that will give students the most difficulty on a new word list and focus their attention to those words (e.g. said, about, does, goes, etc.), and the teacher should point out those words as they appear in shared reading or in context outside the word lists.

Author's Closing Commentary

Automaticity and mastery require practice and consistency – whatever human task is learned. The two stop-gap supplemental literacy programs presented in this document are not an exception to this rule. ***Whatever the teacher practices, the students will know. Conversely, whatever the teacher does not practice, the students will NOT know.*** Hence, the Title 1 ELA teacher must consistently practice and hold the students accountable to what matters!

When children begin to fall behind in school, the teacher (and the elementary principal) should immediately be aware and begin to motivate the child – and provide targeted intervention. If not, by third grade, a struggling student will also develop associated self-esteem issues. Unfortunately, all too often, elementary principals and classroom teachers ‘appear’ to believe that the child will magically ‘catch up’ in some later grade. Generally, this is not the case. The struggling student falls further behind as they advance in years and grade levels. This white paper provides a systematic and proven methodology so ALL children may possess automaticity of word fluency by third grade – especially children of poverty and English Language Learners that struggle more frequently with grade level reading skills. Thus, if grade level reading proficiency is the objective, ***word fluency is a prerequisite.*** Using these two supplemental resources as well as sound standard balanced literacy, structured phonemic awareness and phonics programs, the mass of students are positioned to achieve grade level reading proficiency. It is important to note that an essential element to classroom effectiveness is the stop-gap program’s simplicity in design and ease of implementation; consequently, teacher experience is **not** a factor in the overall success and performance of their use.

Once the student is word fluent and can decode, the reading proficiency battle is only half-won! Students must apply those literacy skill sets in authentic and accountable guided and independent reading methodologies. Guided reading can be extended in a unique fashion in the intermediate elementary grade levels. There is an application pedagogy the author has named GNI – Guided Novel Instruction. That instruction technique is a game changer in the literacy process. Finally, independent (home and school) reading must be monitored and accountable, too. Both GNI and an independent reading tracker/monitoring tool are provided in detail and available for free download at the website address provided in the footer.