

Where intention meets implementation: The challenges and concerns of high-stakes literacy policy

Dr. Robert W. Smith

Watson College of Education
601 South College Road
UNCW
Wilmington, NC 28403
United States of America

Dr. Scott Imig

University of Newcastle
Australia

Dr. Brad Walker

UNCW
United States of America

Sandra Evans

UNCW
United States of America

Abstract

This article reports on North Carolina third grade teachers' experiences in implementing Read to Achieve and their views on the effects of this policy on their teaching and on students' learning. While Read to Achieve was well intended, the program could have been significantly improved had there been more time devoted to its design and piloting. In addition, the study highlights the unintended consequences of high stake testing.

Introduction

In the wake of dramatic political changes in North Carolina (see Fiske and Ladd, 2014), the Read to Achieve Program was enacted with other major education policy changes. These included the removal of tenure for teachers, elimination of the pay supplement for educators earning a master's degree, and the funding of vouchers for public school students to attend private or religious schools. With the goal that all students be able to read on or above grade level by the end of third grade, Read to achieve was presented as an end to social promotion, the practice of promoting students to the next grade who have not met expected learning standards. This article presents findings from a study of North Carolina teachers' experiences implementing Read to Achieve and their views on the effects of this policy on their teaching and on students' learning.

Background

Read to achieve was introduced as part of a larger reform agenda of public education. According to Fiske and Ladd (2014), nearly all of these policy changes introduced by the NC legislature were advocated by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

ALEC is a conservative organization that bills itself as “a partnership of America’s state legislators and members of the private sector which writes model legislation to advance free market enterprise, limited government and federalism” (Alec.org). Michael Apple (2006) asserts that the language of the dominant education reform ideology in the United States is one of *competition, markets, choice, accountability, performance objectives, standards, and testing*. He contends that this philosophy has created a narrative whereby “what is private is necessarily good and what is public is necessarily bad” (Apple, 2006, p. 31). In *Reign of Error*, Ravitch (2013) describes a view “widely shared among policy makers and opinion shapers” that public education in the US is broken, our students are not learning enough, and we are being beaten by other nations with higher test scores threatening not only our economy but also our national security (p. 3). Within this view, she argues, blame is attributed to teachers and principals who “have become comfortable with the status quo of low expectations and low achievement” (p. 3). Given these supposed failures of public schools and public school teachers, the solution from the ALEC perspective is to eliminate teacher tenure, evaluate teachers based on students’ test scores, close failing public schools, and support privatization through vouchers and charter schools. It was in this vein that Read to Achieve was implemented by the North Carolina legislature.

Being able to read is a fundamentally important skill, essential for success in school and in life. According to Fiester (2010), “Reading proficiently by the end of third grade can be a make-or-break benchmark in a child’s education development” (p. 9). While the importance of having all students proficient in reading by the end of third grade is evident in the research, accomplishing this is a challenge. A lack of basic reading skills in early grades is a major problem throughout the United States (Hernandez, 2011; Rose & Schimke, 2012; West, 2012). The 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress testing found 66% of fourth graders not proficient in reading. The percentage was even higher for black students (83%) and Hispanic students (81%) (US Department of Education, 2013). Nearly 80% of students from low-income families were not proficient and students who attended a high-poverty school were more likely (76%) to not score proficient compared to 50% for students attending a school that is not deemed high-poverty. Certainly, the correlations between poverty, failure to read proficiently and failure to graduate from high school are well established (Fiester, 2013). By focusing on reading proficiency and ending social promotion, North Carolina’s Read to Achieve Program was seen by its supporters as increasing students’ chances of being successful in school and life. North Carolina Senate President Phil Berger, the lead architect of Read to Achieve, justified the policy by warning that research demonstrates, “children who leave third grade unable to read are on a path to academic failure and life-long economic hardship” (Berger, 2014).

Third Grade Literacy Policies in the United States

More than a decade ago, Florida was the first state in the nation to implement a policy requiring non-proficient readers to be retained in the third grade (Miller n.d., West, 2012). Florida’s decision to base third grade retention solely on reading assessment proficiency was rooted in the belief that third grade is a critical transition point in a student’s academic career (Miller, n.d). Most notably is the belief that during this time students transition their literacy focus from learning to read to reading to learn (Miller, n.d.).

In 2012, fourteen states developed and passed legislation aimed at grade three reading proficiency including retaining students who did not demonstrate the required reading proficiency (Rose, 2012). In 2013, Mississippi joined other states with their version of a retention policy with S.B. 2347 - *Literacy-Based Promotion Act*, which banned social promotion for students in grade three that exhibit a reading deficit (Workman, 2013). Currently, at least thirty-two states have legislation or policies that address grade three reading proficiency, with fifteen states plus D.C. requiring retention for students not reading at proficiency by the end of third grade (Weyer, 2017).

North Carolina’s Read to Achieve Legislation

North Carolina’s Read to Achieve Program states, “the goal of the State is to ensure that every student read at or above grade level by the end of third grade and continue to progress in reading proficiency so that he or she can read, comprehend, integrate, and apply complex texts needed for secondary education and career success” (North Carolina Read to Achieve Guidebook, 2015, p. 31). While the goal of Read to Achieve is for all students to read proficiently, the legislation lists four specific requirements of the program: the early identification of students with difficulty in reading development, the appropriate instruction and support for students with reading difficulties, the continuous notification to parents of the academic progress of students, and the promotion of students to the next grade based partly on reading proficiency (The Excellent Public Schools Act, 2012).

For a third grade student to be deemed “proficient,” he or she must demonstrate proficiency on twelve North Carolina reading standards (North Carolina Read to Achieve Guidebook, 2015). Each third grade student must take the North Carolina End of Grade (E.O.G.) test and if he or she scores a level three or higher on the test, the student is promoted to grade four. If a student does not have a proficient score on the E.O.G, six alternative methods of demonstrating proficiency are available. These include: 1) a passing score on the Beginning-of-Grade 3 Test (BOG3), 2) a passing score on an approved State Board of Education (SBE) local alternative assessment, 3) achieving a Level P on the state mandated mClass Reading assessment, 4) a retake of the North Carolina E.O.G., 5) a passing score on the North Carolina Read to Achieve test, and 6) successful completion of a SBE approved portfolio. If the student has a proficient score on any of the alternative assessments or successfully completes the portfolio, they are promoted to grade four (North Carolina Read to Achieve Guidebook, 2015).

The portfolio option was designed to allow students to demonstrate proficiency over a period of time rather than in a one-day test (North Carolina Read to Achieve LiveBinder - Portfolio Implementation Guide, 2014). The portfolio consists of 12 standards, 120 passages and five questions per passage that can be used during the regular school year. Students show proficiency by passing three passages per standard for a total of 36 passages. To offer students the greatest chance to not repeat third grade, many schools have mandated the time-intensive portfolio option be completed by all third graders.

Students who are not proficient on any of the six options are recommended to attend a summer “reading camp” with a minimum of 72 hours of intensive reading instruction. At the end of the summer reading camp, students again take the Read to achieve test. Students who earn a proficient score are promoted to grade four, and those who do not are placed in a grade three/four transition class (North Carolina Read to Achieve LiveBinder, n.d.). Non-proficient students who choose not to attend summer reading camp are automatically placed in either an accelerated grade three class the following school year or a transition classroom (North Carolina Read to Achieve LiveBinder, n.d.). The transition class is a fourth grade class, where students receive additional daily instruction and support with grade three reading standards.

In a review of the evidence on effective literacy teaching, Hall (2013) states that effective literacy teachers integrate “learning of the codes of written language with uses and purposes of literacy that are meaningful to the learner” (p. 316). She describes teachers who “provide extensive opportunities for their pupils to read and respond to children’s literature and to write for a variety of authentic purposes as well as attend to sound-symbol correspondence, word recognition, spelling patterns, vocabulary, punctuation, grammar, and text structure” (p. 316). In addition, Pianta, Belsky, Vandergrift, Houts and Morrison (2008) report that “the emotional quality of the classroom setting—the warmth of adult-child interactions, as well as the adults’ skill in detecting and responding to individual children’s needs—was a consistent predictor of reading skill growth” (p.393). With Read to Achieve’s focus on ending social promotion, little attention was given to how students are being taught to read, or how the well-established connection between poverty and reading challenges should be addressed. Read to achieve as a policy was clearly focused more on assessment and accountability rather than effective teaching practice.

Method

This study reports third grade teachers’ views regarding teaching, student reading ability, student interest in reading, and student stress at the end of Read to Achieve’s second year of implementation. An online survey link was sent to third grade teachers in 12 North Carolina School districts. Three-hundred third grade teachers were invited to complete the survey and ninety-nine did so (a response rate of 33%). Responding teachers had a range of teaching experience and taught a diverse group of students from schools located in rural, suburban, and urban areas. In terms of teaching experience, 9% of respondents had 1-3 years of experience, 26% had 4-9 years of experience, 20% had been teaching for 10-14 years and 45% percent of respondents had 15 or more years of experience. In relation to the number of years they had taught third grade, 31% of respondents had taught for 1-3 years followed by 30% who taught for more than 12 years. Fifty-six percent of respondents taught in a rural area, 32% in a suburban area, and 11% in an urban area. Over sixty percent of respondents taught at schools in which 60-100% of students received free or reduced lunch. Eight percent of respondents taught in schools where 20% or fewer students received free or reduced lunch.

Follow-up phone interviews were conducted with five of the survey respondents. These five respondents indicated a willingness to participate in a follow-up interview when completing the survey. Structured interviews lasted from thirty to forty minutes and were transcribed. Open coding was used on each transcript (Merriam, 2009).

The interviews provided a more in-depth exploration of the effects of Read to Achieve on teachers and their students.

Impact of Read to Achieve on Students

Overall, 60% of teachers surveyed in this study indicated they agreed with Read to Achieve’s goal to “ensure that every student read at or above grade level by the end of third grade.” However, based on their judgement of the program’s effect on student reading ability, 39% of respondents indicated that the legislation had a negative effect, 28% indicated that the legislation had a positive effect, and 33% indicated that the legislation had no effect (See Table 1). Sixty-five percent of respondents indicated that the Read to achieve legislation has a negative effect on students’ interest in reading. Respondents reported that students have become very apathetic about reading and one stated that Read to Achieve “takes the joy out of reading.” When asked how Read to Achieve has affected students’ interest in school, 71% of respondents indicated that the legislation has had a negative effect. One respondent commented, “All of the testing, summer school, retesting, etcetera is making children hate school and more importantly hate reading. Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated that the legislation has led to an increase in students’ stress and anxiety. One respondent stated, “Students’ anxiety levels are higher than I have ever seen and the law complicates this by providing many opportunities for students to view themselves as failures.”

Table 1.

The Effects of Read to Achieve on Student Ability, Interest in Reading and School

	Significantly Negative Effect	Negative Effect	No Effect	Positive Effect	Significantly Positive Effect
Student Reading Ability (N=97)	4.12%	35.05%	32.99%	24.74%	3.09%
Student Interest in Reading (N=99)	16.16%	49.49%	27.27%	7.07%	0.0%
Student Interest in School (N=98)	14.29%	57.14%	27.55%	1.02%	0.0%

Impact of Read to Achieve on Teachers and Teaching

In relation to teaching and learning, participants were asked, “To what extent has the Read to Achieve Legislation affected the quality of teaching and learning in your classroom?” Seventy-two percent of respondents indicated that the legislation has had a negative effect on the quality of teaching and learning in their classroom and twenty-three percent indicated a positive effect (See Table 2). One teacher stated, “Students are learning more about how to answer multiple-choice reading tests than they are how to read, comprehend, discuss, and enjoy books.” Although lamenting the loss of teaching time, another teacher noted that, “[Read to Achieve] has also helped the students become more proficient in their ability to become successful with responding to passages.”

Table 2.

Read to Achieve Effects on Quality of Teaching and Learning in Third-Grade Classrooms

	Strong Negative Effect	Negative Effect	No Effect	Positive Effect	Strong Positive Effect
Quality of Teaching and Learning in your Classroom (N=93)	16.13%	55.91%	5.38%	21.51%	1.08%

In relation to teachers’ time in the classroom, respondents were asked about the amount of time spent teaching and the amount of time spent assessing. Eighty-one percent of respondents indicated that they spend less classroom time teaching (See Table 3). One respondent said, “Sorting, filing, recording, grading, and securing of materials has taken a huge amount of my time away that I need for actual instruction and planning.” Eighty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they now spend more time on assessment. Respondent comments included: “I am assessing more than I am instructing and for me, that is a huge problem” and “this over-testing of students has to stop.”

Table 3.

Effects of Read to Achieve on Time Spent Teaching and Assessing

	Spend Significantly Less Time	Spend Less Time	No Change	Spend More Time	Spend Significantly More Time
The Amount of Time You Spend Teaching in Your Classroom (N=93)	32.26%	48.39%	11.83%	5.38%	2.15%
The Amount of Time You Spend Assessing in Your Classroom (N=94)	1.06%	5.32%	6.38%	18.09%	69.15%

Respondents were asked, “On an average school day, how many minutes do students spend reading a book in class?” Sixty-four percent of respondents indicated students spent between 11 and 30 minutes a day of class time reading a book (See Table 4). However, 12.5% of respondents indicated students only spent 10 minutes or less a day reading a book in class. One of the main concerns was that the amount of time spent reading passages left little time for students to read a book.

Table 4.

Time Spent Reading Books in Class

Reading a Book in Class	0-10 minutes	11-20 minutes	21-30 minutes	31-45 minutes	46-60 minutes	Over 60 minutes
All respondents (N=88)	12.5%	29.56%	34.09%	13.64%	6.82%	3.4%

In relation to reading methods, respondents were asked, “What methods are you implementing to help children pass third grade reading requirements? Respondents reported that the four most frequently used methods for teaching reading were Mini Lessons 92%; Read to Achieve Passages 89%; Silent Reading Time 82%; and Literature Response Groups 78% (See Table 5). Teachers’ responses indicate the importance given to the Read to achieve passages for the portfolio assessment.

Table 5.

Methods Used to Teach Reading in Third Grade Classrooms

Methods Implemented	36 Read to Achieve Passages	Silent Reading Time	Commercial reading Program (scripted, phonics)	Commercial Reading Program (holistic)	Literature Response Groups	Mini-Lessons	Reading Conferen ces
All respondents (N=94)	89.36%	81.91%	28.72%	32.98%	78.72%	92.55%	61.70%

Fifty-three percent of respondents indicated the Read to Achieve legislation made it less likely that they will continue to teach third grade. Forty-two percent indicated that the new legislation had not affected their intentions to continue teaching third grade. One respondent commented she would possibly move to high school because the stress of assessments was “taking a huge toll on my health and life.” Another noted, “For the last two years, every third grade teacher at my school has asked to be reassigned to a new grade level.”

Impact of Read to Achieve on Curriculum

Respondents were asked how the Read to Achieve Legislation has affected time for other core subjects (mathematics, science and social studies). A majority of respondents indicated that the legislation had a negative effect, 6% indicated a positive effect, and 33% indicated no effect. For time spent on other core subjects, 47% of respondents indicated that the legislation resulted in less classroom time spent on mathematics, and 72% reported that the legislation led to a decrease in the classroom time spent on social studies and science. Fifty-seven percent of respondents indicated that students spent more time on English language Arts (See Table 6).

Table 6.

Effects of Read to Achieve on the Teaching of Other Academic Subjects

The Amount of Time Students Spend on The Following Academic Subjects (N=94)	Spend Significantly Less Time	Spend Less Time	No change	Spend More Time	Spend Significantly More Time
Mathematics	6.38%	40.43%	52.13%	1.06%	0.0%
English Language Arts	7.45%	27.66%	7.45%	34.04%	23.40%
Social Studies	38.30%	34.04%	24.47%	3.19%	0.0%
Science	35.48%	36.56%	25.81%	2.15%	0.0%

Finally, over 85% of respondents reported that the legislation had no effect on the amount of classroom time spent on art, music, physical education, and drama. Many teachers stated that these subjects have fixed timetables and, therefore, are not affected by changes in classrooms. Eighteen percent of respondents reported that the legislation led to a decrease in time spent at recess, while 80% reported no change.

Teacher Interviews

Five experienced third-grade teachers participated in phone-based, interviews. Three of the participants, Amy, Helen and Maureen, taught at schools with a high percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch. In contrast, Joan taught in a suburban school where fewer than 10% of children received free and reduced lunch. The final participant, Kacey, served as an instructional coach for her district, where she administered the mClass assessments for all third graders.

Amy

Amy is a veteran teacher with twenty-five years of experience. She is currently teaching third grade for the second year. She teaches in an urban school, where the majority of students are African American, and where 100% of the children receive free and reduced lunch. Six of the 18 students in her class did not pass the Read to achieve portfolio. She indicated she liked the reading passage portfolio because it provided another means, in addition to the End of Grade test, to know students' reading performance and whether or not they will be promoted to the next grade. She viewed the portfolio as something students could work on throughout the year. However, she stated that she did not “feel like the positive outweighs the negative at all. There’s so much testing pressure and all these added assessments. I feel like we assess all the time.” In terms of how Read to Achieve has affected her teaching, she stated that she and her fellow teachers “felt that we ended up teaching how to pass it rather than quality reading instruction.” She said she would much prefer to teach her children reading using complete books and magazine articles rather than “here’s another passage.”

Amy described one student who started the school mid-year and was reading at about a first-grade level. “He was expected to sit and do this portfolio passage, yet he can’t read the passage. So, his behavior issues kicked in because he was frustrated. How’s he going to answer questions about a passage he can’t read?” In contrast, she described three students who passed the E.O.G. and passed every passage for the portfolio. “So their whole third grade year was redundant when they could have been doing some enrichment types of projects. It’s like beating a dead horse.” In terms of student interest in reading, Amy stated that reading “got to the point where kids didn’t want to look at another passage.”

Helen

Helen has taught for ten years, four at her current school, which is an inner-city school with over 80% of the students African American and 100% of the students receive free and reduced lunch. She is teaching third grade for the second time and this last year she had 18 children in her class. She had looped with her children from second grade to third grade and so she knew that they loved reading and that they enjoyed learning from reading. However, none of her students passed the beginning E.O.G. and she was required to do the passages as part of the portfolio. She stated, “Whenever I’d tell the kids it was time to do a test, there was a collective moan in the group.” In terms of teaching, she said the passages “took so much time out of my teaching, going over them, talking about them and scoring them.” Students completed passages twice a week and each passage took anywhere from thirty to forty-five minutes. She stated, “There’s no instruction as it’s basically like a test session,” and she was frustrated that she did not get “to dig deeply into stories or chapter books.”

Helen gave a mixed assessment of Read to Achieve. She stated, “The requirements are not necessarily unreasonable. Of course we want all students to read and be successful, but the actual passages and the means in which they’re choosing to go about it are definitely frustrating and in a lot of ways have taken away the love of teaching reading for me.” When asked if Read to Achieve helped motivate her she stated, “it hasn’t motivated me to do better or helped me at all. I mean it has made me more aware of my students’ data, but not necessarily more aware of how they learn.” Of the 18 students in her class, four were diagnosed as Exceptional Children and despite being more than two years behind in reading, they were able to move to fourth grade. However, she stated that they still had to take the test. She was pleased that 100% of her students either met the requirement or were exempt.

Joan

Joan has taught for 11 years, five being at her current suburban school where she teaches third grade and where fewer than 10% of children qualify for free and reduced lunch. She described her students as being very motivated, setting goals to improve themselves and to beat others. She described working collectively as a team with the three other third grade teachers: “I plan all the language arts, so we’re really in sync with what we’re doing.” She stated that Read to Achieve “helped me to really understand that I have to teach specific aspects of a test, and illustrations,” but that it negatively impacted her teaching—she had wanted to do literacy circles every nine weeks but by the end of the school year had only managed to complete two.

Joan spoke positively about Reach to Achieve’s impact on student learning and how students had been taught to approach the assessments and their motivation. She stated, “We’re having them set goals. I’m having them be accountable. And that’s made a difference. And they’ll ask me, ‘what’s my score? What’s my score?’ However, she expressed concerns about Read to Achieve’s effect on student learning, stating that students “know how to take standardized tests, but does that mean they know how to read a book, a character, and understand emotions, and the events, and the problems?”

Kacey

Kacey has 17 years of experience teaching first, third, and fifth grades. For the last two years she has served as an instructional coach for her district, responsible for completing the mClass assessments for all third graders. She described North Carolina as having good intentions by offering different ways that children could demonstrate proficiency in reading. However, she stated that Read to Achieve was meant to be a formative program, but now it is being used as high-stakes summative assessment. Like Amy, Kacey was concerned about students having to complete the portfolio in case they did not pass assessments. Her biggest concerns relate to the “unintended consequences” of the high-stakes nature of Read to Achieve and teachers “teaching to the test.” She asserted, “These kids are going to leave school knowing how to answer particular questions, but then they’re not going to have any kind of higher-order thinking skills.”

She stated that she knows the “teachers mean well because they don’t want the kids retained.” but that it was infuriating that students were missing out on what they needed in order to be strong readers.

In terms of the impact of Read to Achieve on students’ stress level, Kacey described how students know “that they’ve got to pass the portfolio, or they have got to pass level P, and the whole year they’re worried about passing and being able to go to the next grade.” For some students, she described the need to pass as “creating just panic and anxiety in these eight- and nine-year-olds. These poor kids are being tested all year long and they’re starting to hate reading.”

Maureen

Maureen has taught third grade for most of her 22 years as a teacher. She has been teaching for six years at her current school, a school where more than 80% of students receive free and reduced lunch. She described how the third grade teachers work really hard with the second grade teachers to make sure that students with special needs are appropriately identified and exempt from Read to Achieve. Fifteen out of 80 third grade students at her school did not pass Read to Achieve and had to be retested. She recognized both positive and negative aspects of Read to Achieve. She stated that many of the passages were very challenging for her students but that the type of questioning included with the passages was aligned with North Carolina Common Core State Standards. However, she described her workload as “just ridiculous.” This included the time it takes to run the program as well as the record keeping involved. She appreciated that the portfolio provided another option for students who had failed the EOG test or were not proficient for the mClass assessment to pass reading.

In terms of the impact of the program on students, Maureen described how she never spoke to students about “passing or failing a passage” and how important it was that the teachers provided encouragement and motivational pep talks. While Maureen said that she did not see much negative emotional response from her children, she described one boy’s struggle: “I never saw him cry, but his mother would call or text me pretty much nightly and report that he cried.”

Discussion

This study of third grade teachers identified a number of effects of Read to Achieve. Thirty-nine percent of survey respondents indicated a negative effect on students’ reading ability; 65% indicated a negative effect on student interest in reading, and 71% expressed a negative effect on student interest in school. These statistics raise serious concerns about Read to Achieve. A major issue identified by respondents was that students were not being exposed to literature, and in turn were unable to experience the joy of reading. In addition, 72% of respondents indicated that Read to Achieve had a negative impact on the quality of their teaching and their students’ learning. Specifically, 81% of respondents indicated that with the implementation of Read to Achieve they spent less classroom time teaching, and 87% reported spending more time on assessment.

In addition to the amount of time spent on assessment, teachers expressed concern that classroom time was being used to teach students how to pass the test rather than engaging them in quality reading instruction. Teachers recognized the value of the portfolio in enabling students to submit evidence of proficiency over a period of time rather than being judged on one exam. However, the passages required for the portfolio became the default reading curriculum for many teachers. A serious, yet unintended, consequence of Read to Achieve may be a cohort of young children who have developed a disdain for the very thing the program was intended to support – reading.

It is important to use caution in generalizing the findings of this study both because respondents were from a limited geographical area in North Carolina and because the teachers who chose to complete the survey and phone interview may not be representative of third grade teachers in North Carolina. However, the findings of this study at the end of Read to Achieve’s second year of implementation are consistent with some of the key findings from the assessment conducted by SERVE during the first year of Read to Achieve (SERVE Center, 2014). Both suggest that the Read to achieve program could have been greatly improved if educators had been more fully involved in the design and if the program was first piloted. While few would disagree with the noble goal of ensuring every child can read, Read to Achieve has the markings of poor public policy and implementation.

Read to achieve was implemented in North Carolina along with many other educational reforms as part of the ALEC agenda supporting market driven reforms and limited government. In this agenda, educators and public schools are seen as part of the problem and a strong legislator creating educational policy as the solution. In that regard, Read to Achieve was part of a reform agenda designed and implemented with little input from educators.

In a comparison of approaches to educational reform, Darling-Hammond describes key elements of the standards and assessment approach: “high stakes testing systems that attach rewards and sanctions to students’ scores on standardized tests. These include grade retention or promotion, student graduation, merit pay awards or threats of dismissal for teacher and administrators, and closure or reconstitution for schools” (p. 67). She concludes that nearly two decades later, “there is plentiful evidence that tests alone have not improved schools or created educational opportunities without investments in curriculum, teaching, and school supports” (p.74). It appears the authors of North Carolina’s Read to Achieve legislation ignored this research as they created a plan built on testing and retention. Perhaps this study, and others like it, that demonstrate the actual effects of test-centered policies on students and teachers will help to shift the focus back to student learning, engagement and quality teaching practice.

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