

**Moving (M) OR Stuck (S)**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ “A family’s level of income is used as an excuse. We can’t do that. Sometimes people say the poor students have limits. I say all kids have limits. I believe we have not reached the limits of any of our kids in the system, including the poor children.”
2. \_\_\_\_\_ “I believe that any student can learn if they want to learn and are prepared to learn. Parents just need to do a better job.”
3. \_\_\_\_\_ “All children might not be able to learn, but surely everyone can learn to behave.”
4. \_\_\_\_\_ “If parents were doing what they’re supposed to be doing, we wouldn’t have any problems. They need to turn off the TV and read.”
5. \_\_\_\_\_ “It’s amazing what kids can do if we ask them to...We have got to hold kids accountable! It’s a sin that we as a country and educational institutions have allowed kids to just get by. We need to do a better job educating the kids we have!
6. \_\_\_\_\_ “We have different personalities on the board, but we are focused on one thing: the kids.”
7. \_\_\_\_\_ “How can you hold teachers accountable for student improvements in academics?...When dealing with human beings, there’s not much you can do about accountability. You can lead a horse to water, but can’t make him drink. This applies to both students and staff.”
8. \_\_\_\_\_ “We do everything we can for every child who comes through our doors.”
9. \_\_\_\_\_ “You can only improve bottom up...My contention is if a student is in middle school and can’t read, you probably have lost the student. We spend too many resources on remediation.”
10. \_\_\_\_\_ “There is just too damn much staff development. If you ask me whether or not it improves teaching, well, no – teachers just teach how they were taught.”
11. \_\_\_\_\_ “You can’t overlook the need for parents to send better kids to school.”
12. \_\_\_\_\_ “We don’t let go of reading at 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade. We are stressing learning to read even in the middle school.”

## Roles of the Board for Improving Student Achievement

The Iowa Lighthouse research studies frame five main leadership roles of the board in improving student learning, along with key actions of the board within those roles.

### 1. Set Clear Expectations

- Get clear about the greatest student learning needs – the most important content area to improve first
- Believe more is possible and communicate high expectations
- Establish a clear and narrow focus for improvement – clarify improvement goals and specific targets
- Focus on student learning and teaching (improving teaching as the key strategy for improving learning)

### 2. Hold the System Accountable to the Expectations

- Use data extensively
- Determine what you will accept as evidence of progress/success
- Monitor progress regularly
- Apply pressure for accountability

### 3. Create Conditions for Success

- Demonstrate commitment to the improvement focus through board actions and decisions
- Support quality professional development
- Stay the course
- Support & connect with district-wide leadership
- Develop and nurture the board/superintendent team leadership
- Ensure all parts of the system are aligned around the learning needs of students (curriculum, instruction, assessment; goals, actions, resource allocation; etc.)

### 4. Build Collective Will

- Create awareness of the need
- Create urgency around the moral purpose of improvement
- Instill hope that it's possible to change
- Connect with the community

### 5. Learn Together as a Board Team

- Establish board learning time
- Learn together
- Talk to each other – extensive board conversations
- Develop a willingness and readiness to lead and allow others to lead
- Build commitment to the improvement focus through shared information and discussion
- Engage in deliberative policy development – lead through your policies

## The Detectives

It had been raining. Kate and her brother Michael were looking for something entertaining to do. Aunt Sue came into the living room and announced, “I can’t find my purse.”

The children looked for the missing purse in various parts of the house. Michael looked in the den where his aunt wrote checks, but no purse. Kate searched the bedroom carefully because the purse was last seen there. It wasn’t there, but Kate recalled that her aunt had been shopping earlier that day. She ran outside. Just as she arrived, Michael was opening the trunk and Kate saw the purse.

*Sample 4th Grade Reading Passage  
Basic Reading Inventory, (Form B) Eighth Edition*

## Comprehension Questions

1. What is this story about?
2. What were Kate and Michael doing at the beginning of the story?
3. Why were Kate and Michael inside?
4. Where did Kate and Michael look for the purse?
5. Why did Michael go into the den to look for the purse?
6. Besides the house, where had Aunt Sue been that day?
7. Where was the purse found?
8. Why do you think this story is called "The Detectives"?
9. What qualities made Kate and Michael good detectives? Why?
10. What does "various" mean?

## “Our Environment”

Besides using plants and animals for food, people use the hides of animals for shoes, the wood from trees to build houses, the fiber from the cotton plant to make skirts and shirts, and the wool from sheep to make suits and coats. Even the synthetic fibers that people use are made from matter found in the environment.

People and the environment are interdependent, but that is not the whole story. Modern people can do much more; they can use science and technology to change their environment. Because of their advanced brains, people can investigate and use their precious environment.

*Sample 8th Grade Reading Passage  
Basic Reading Inventory,  
(Form B) Eighth Edition*

## Comprehension Questions

1. What is this passage about? (people's interdependence with their environment; how people use their environment)
2. What do modern people use to change the environment? (science and technology)
3. Why are people able to investigate their environment? (they have a brain)
4. What are synthetic fibers made from? (matter found in the environment)
5. What are some things in the environment which people use? (plants; animals; wood; cotton; wool [any 2])
6. What does the passage say people use to make skirts and shirts? (fiber from the cotton plant)
7. According to the passage, what are the hides of animals used for? (shoes)
8. What are some ways in which people have changed the environment? (any logical response)
9. Do you think it's a good thing for people to change their environment? Why? (any logical response)
10. What does "synthetic" mean? (made from several things put together)

Do we feel the urgency?  
*Every Child, Every School, Success for All*

Every child can learn. Every school can ensure the success of every child.

Statements to this effect appear in goals statements, commission reports, and school district offices. They are posted in school buildings and appear as mottoes on school stationery. But does our education system behave as if they are true?

If we truly believed that every child could learn under the proper circumstances, we would be relentless in the search of those circumstances. We would use well-validated instructional methods and materials known to be capable of ensuring the success of nearly all children if used with intelligence, flexibility, and fidelity. We would involve teachers in constant, collaborative professional development activities to continually improve their abilities to reach every child. We would frequently assess children's performance to be sure that all students are on a path that leads to success, and to be able to respond immediately if children are not making adequate progress. If children were falling behind despite excellent instruction, we would try different instructional approaches, and if necessary, we would provide them with tutors or other intensive assistance. We would involve parents in support of their children's school success; . . .

If we truly believed that all children could learn, we would rarely, if ever, assign children to special education or long-term remedial programs that in effect lower expectations for children.

If we truly believed that all schools could ensure the success of all children, then the failure of even a single child would be cause for great alarm and immediate, forceful intervention.

Excerpt from a book by  
Robert Slavin, Nancy Madden, Lawrence Dolan, and Barbara Wasik, 1996  
Thousand Oaks, CA; Corwin Press

## Can schools beat the odds? Yes.

### George Hall Elementary, Birmingham, AL

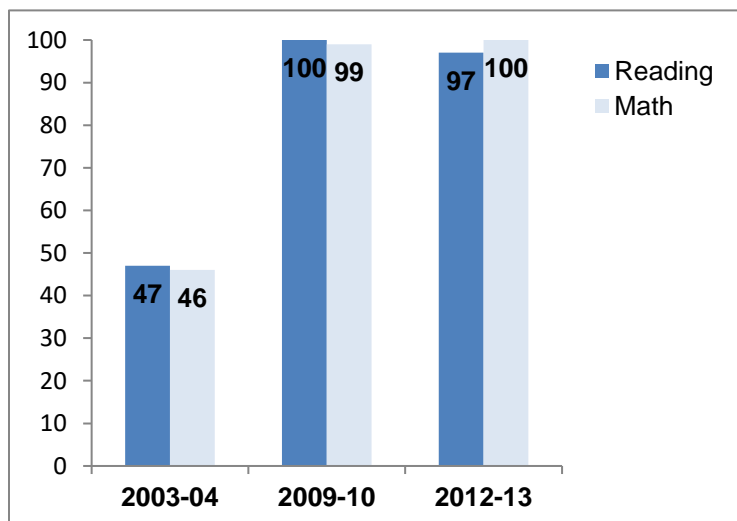
- 100% African-American
- 97% Poverty

#### 2004

- Chronic, “Low Performing” status
- Lowest test scores in the state
- Less than 50% of students on grade level
- High frequency of discipline issues

District takeover in 2004; new principal and staff. Focus on teacher collaboration; instruction time is highly protected; formative assessment daily

Gr. 4 Reading % Meets or Exceeds Standard on State Assessments



#### 2013

- Maintaining excellence
- Now one of the highest performing schools in AL
- Numerous awards including Blue Ribbon School in 2008

“We don’t look to place blame in this building. Instead, we look for solutions.”

—*Agnes Terri Tomlinson, principal*  
(The Education Trust, 2013.)

“If you get the right people with the right mindset and the right support, and the right vision in place...all those things that typically people use to say ‘students can’t do,’ they’re able to do.”

—*State Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice*

(<https://news.wbhm.org/feature/2012/turnaroundschoolsalabamasgeorgehallpt1/>, 2012)



### **Kennewick, Washington School District**

Between 1995 and 2004, the percentage of third grade students reading on grade level increased from 57% to 88%.

In 1995, the Kennewick School Board established the goal that 90% of their 3rd graders would be reading on grade level. By 1998, 71% of their 3rd graders had succeeded in reading on grade level. In a book\* which describes their efforts to increase reading, members of the Kennewick School Board outline five steps the board had taken to improve reading achievement:

1. Established a clear measurable goal, which became the priority goal for the board and the district and the number one use of board meeting time;
2. Established a solid, accurate system for measuring reading ability;
3. Reported the percentage of students reading in or above the standard in grade-level equivalents to the public and staff, and to individual students on their own status in parent-teacher conferences;
4. Issued a district-wide position paper outlining ground rules for reaching the reading goal;
5. Involved parents and engaged the community in reading to children 20 minutes a day from birth through elementary school.

(L Fielding et. al., 2004.)

### **Northern Lights, Alberta, Canada**

The Northern Lights School District took part in a study that examined the effects of an early literacy curriculum on kindergarten students' early literacy skill development. Eight teachers took part in the study that included high quality professional development as part of the curriculum implementation. In eight classrooms, 141 students were taught with the new curriculum.

Assessment administered at the end of kindergarten revealed:

- 40% of the students appeared to be able to read extended.
- Another 30% showed emergent ability to read extended text.
- 20% reached the Grade 2A level, which includes long and complex passages and requires the exercise of complex skills both to decode and to infer word meanings.
- No students experienced failure; all the students could manage at least the simplest level of books.
- There were no differences in skill development and success between children who did or did not have subsidized lunches.
- Only two students were referred to speech therapy at the end of the year – typically 20 students would have been referred to as having special needs.

(Showers et al., 2003)

## Reality check: all children can learn

Learning disabilities are not a prescription for failure. With the right kinds of instruction, guidance and support, there are no limits to what individuals with LD can achieve.

(National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014)

Several conclusions can be drawn from the present findings. First, our data are quite in keeping with results from other intervention studies which have shown that the majority of children who experience early reading difficulties can become functional readers if they are provided with early and intensive remediation tailored to their individual strengths and weaknesses.

(Vellutino and Scanlon, 2002)

The latest research on children with reading difficulties suggests that only a few students (perhaps 2-4%) have difficulties that stem from intractable neurological or intellectual malfunctions. Most are simply children who are not responding well to instruction. When those students are provided a rich and intensive diet of instructional support through some sort of special intervention, they can learn to function within the normal range of performance for their age mates.

(Pearson and Dunsmore, 1998)

### **Quotable**

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.

— *Ronald Edmonds, Harvard University*

## What Makes a Difference?

### **Teacher Quality Matters Most**

Research finds that student learning gains are related to:

- Strong academic background
- Quality preparation prior to entry
- Certification in the field taught
- Experience (> 3 years)
- National Board Certification

In combination, these characteristics predict more of the difference in student learning gains than race & parent education combined.

(Linda Darling Hammond presentation (2012) referring to the article “Teacher Credentials and Student Achievement in High School” by Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor (2008).

Teacher quality more heavily influenced differences in student performance than did race, class, or school of the student; disadvantaged students benefited more from good teachers than did advantaged students.

(Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges 2004)

Good teachers are unquestionably the thing that matters most. Studies indicate students with more effective teachers showed 6 times greater gains than those with less effective teachers, regardless of the students’ background.

(Kati Haycock, Iowa FINE Conference, Nov. 1, 2002)

### **Teacher Quality is an Equity Issue**

Poor and minority students were about twice as likely to have teachers with less than three years of teaching experience; and districts in which the majority of students were poor or minority were considerably more likely to employ uncertified teachers.

(National Center for Education Statistics 2000; Darling-Hammond 1999).

But regardless of the reason, many children – especially low-income and minority children – are entering the classroom without the knowledge and skills they need to succeed...The very children who most need strong teachers are assigned, on average, to teachers with less experience, less education, and less skill than those who teach other children.

(Peske & Haycock, 2006)

### **Teacher Practice Can Improve**

High quality professional development can improve teacher practice and increase student achievement. A review of experimental studies found that student achievement increased by 21 percentile points among programs offering extended professional development (49 hours on average over 6 to 12 months).

(Yoon et al., 2007)

No improvement effort has ever succeeded in the absence of thoughtfully planned and well implemented professional development.

(Guskey and Yoon, 2009)

## Six Characteristics of an Effective Vision

A vision draws a picture for the future of what can be better than the present.

John Kotter in his book *Leading Change* lists characteristics that should be reflected in an effective vision:

1. **Imaginable:** Conveys a picture of what the future will look like
2. **Desirable:** Appeals to the long-term interests of employees, customers, stockholders, and others who have a stake in the enterprise
3. **Feasible:** Comprises realistic, attainable goals
4. **Focused:** Is clear enough to provide guidance in decision making
5. **Flexible:** Is general enough to allow individual initiative and alternative responses in light of changing conditions
6. **Communicable:** Is easy to communicate; can be successfully explained within five minutes

The change process for most people is extremely difficult because of the fear of the unknown. Powerful forces try to maintain the status quo at all cost. The pain of the present must be contrasted with the pain of the change process so that everyone knows the option of no change is not realistic.

Everyone needs to understand on the front end that sacrifices are necessary and there will be discomfort during the transition. However, if the vision takes the group to a better and more viable place then all the costs involved will be worth it.

My vision for SSA ISD is:

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My commitments to the SSA ISD School Board are:

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