



## **Reading Policies that Support Children and Families**

For the last 16 years, Idaho has attempted to address low reading proficiency among children in kindergarten through third grade with the Idaho Reading Initiative, implemented in 2000. The initiative provided, for the first time, a screener in grades K-3 to identify children who were struggling with reading in the early years.<sup>1</sup> This screener is called the Idaho Reading Indicator, or IRI. The Idaho Reading Initiative also provided funds through the Extended Reading Intervention program (ERI) to create 40-hour interventions for these readers, with varying funding levels.

It is clear that Idaho has outgrown the Idaho Reading Initiative as the sole policy approach aimed at improving early literacy. In interviews with several high-performing localities conducted by Idaho Voices for Children, school leaders reported using Idaho Reading Initiative tools, combined with innovative local approaches to address the needs of their children.

State policies that promote early reading proficiency include proper identification of struggling readers, and quality interventions. The three localities profiled in this brief have each put in place a local reading assessment that provides additional information about children's specific reading challenges. To provide quality interventions, two of these localities have used additional funding sources specific to their circumstances, while the third benefits from the resources of one of the largest school districts in Idaho.

### **Lessons from Three Idaho Localities**

#### **McCall-Donnelly School District, McCall, ID**

##### ***Dynamic extended learning time in kindergarten***

*"We made a conscious decision to use our funds for things that made a difference for kids."  
– Superintendent Jim Foudy*

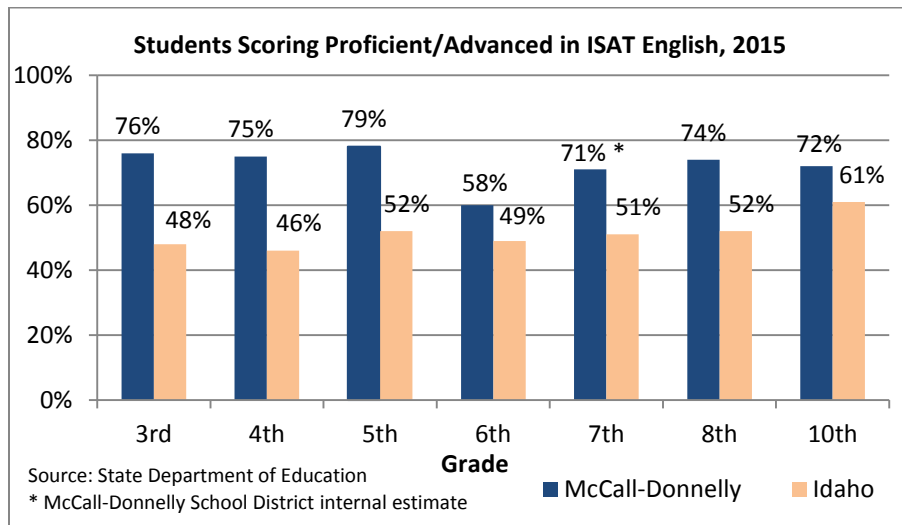
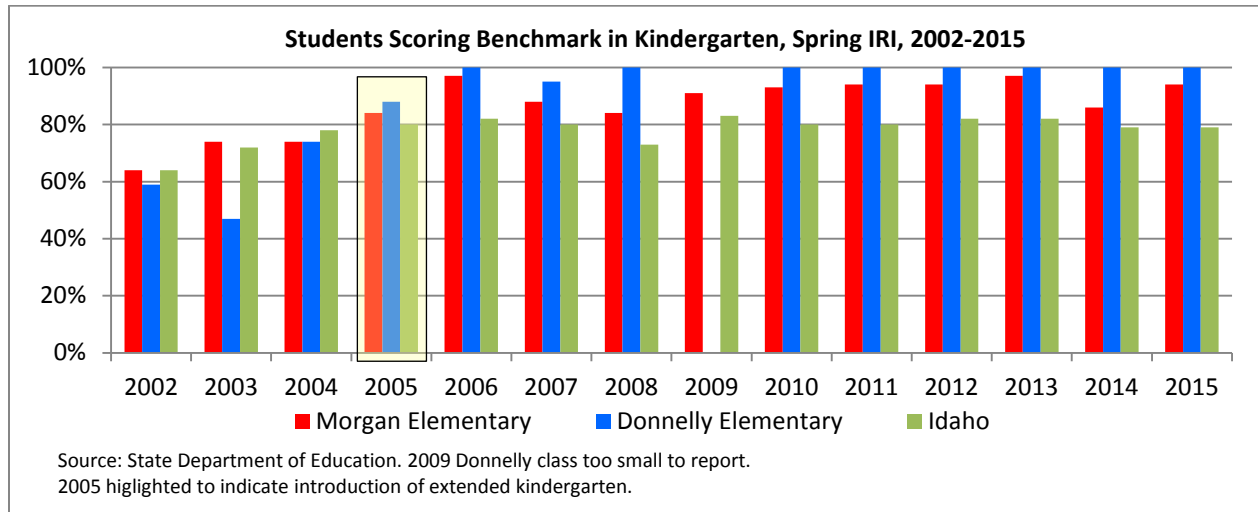
McCall-Donnelly created a dynamic extended time program for struggling readers in kindergarten that is responsive to students' literacy challenges throughout the year. Using local dollars from a special supplemental levy charter, the district's two elementary schools (Donnelly and Barbara Morgan) are able to fund their kindergarten teachers to stay for extended time in the afternoon.

In the first few weeks, all kids spend the afternoons engaging in local multi-dimensional literacy assessments. By the end, staff has a comprehensive picture of kids' language, social, motor, and early literacy skills, as well as a parent interview that sheds light on literacy in the home. A small group of children are selected who would fall behind in literacy without additional support. Parents are briefed on their child's particular challenges, the additional time option, and the option of a school lunch.

Working with their regular kindergarten teacher helps kids build on morning instruction time while receiving more intensive help tailored to their challenges. Teachers make instructional decisions based on the small group needs, and are able to incorporate local assessments to identify kids who have improved and no longer need the extra time. As children struggle with particular topics, they receive the

extra time until they are caught up to grade level. By the end of the year, the majority of children are working above grade level, and a small group at grade level, according to Superintendent Jim Foudy.

“It’s not a product, it’s a process,” says Foudy, who has seen high IRI scores in both of his district’s elementary schools translate into high achievement for the district on the third-grade ISAT (charts below). Extended time for kids in grades 1-3 is also available, but not at the same intensity as kindergarten. “The 40 hours for each kid, it’s too rigid...we have to do something significantly different,” says Foudy. See charts below, which illustrate that McCall-Donnelly students achieve higher scores than the state overall. The dynamic extended kindergarten time began in January 2005.



**Lake Pend Oreille School District and Panhandle Alliance for Education, Sandpoint, ID**  
***Literacy supports through a public-private partnership***

Since 2002, Lake Pend Oreille School District (LPOSD) has fostered a partnership with the Panhandle Alliance for Education (PAFE), a private foundation based in Sandpoint that provides financial support

## Idaho Voices for Children

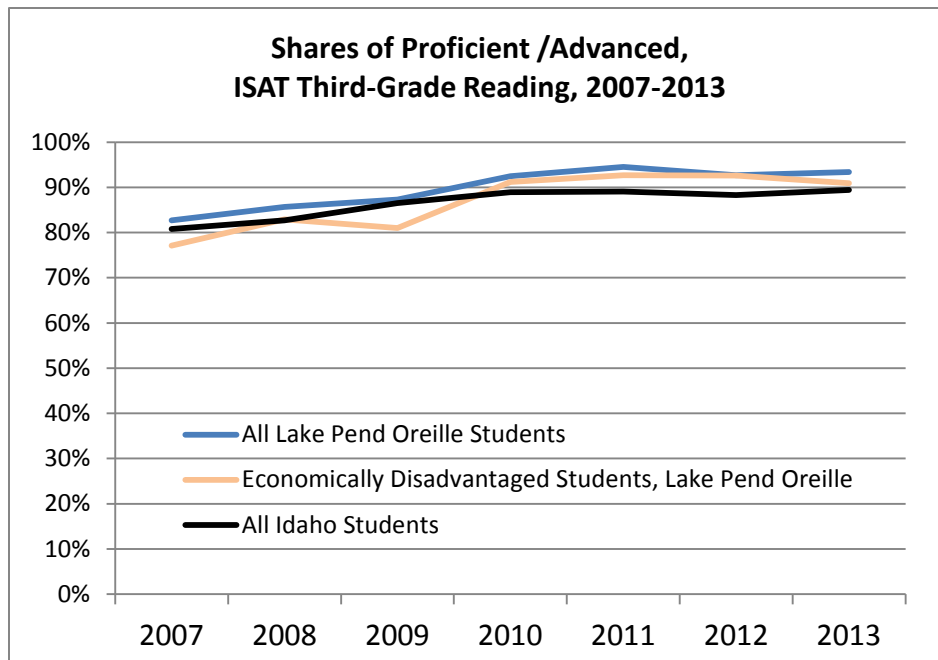
for an array of locally-designed programs. As a result, the schools have created several literacy interventions targeted to struggling readers, some of which also benefit kids at large.

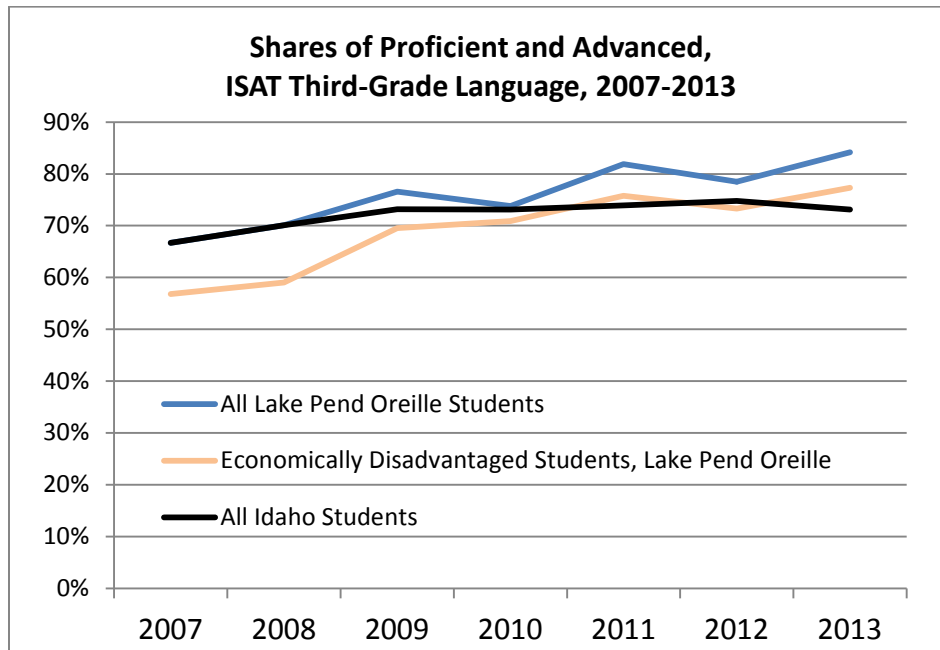
The district uses grants from PAFE to address “summer slide,” or the setback experienced by elementary school children in the summer when they can fall behind by as much as the equivalent of two months in reading. The grants are used for a summer library program that keeps the local library branch’s doors open and the computer lab available. Over 170 students were involved in 2015 through this partnership with the East Bonner County Library.

PAFE also provides scholarships for students to attend an extended time kindergarten program, based on financial need and skill level. According to Marcia Wilson, Executive Director of PAFE, benefits include more one-on-one time with teachers, increased independence, and improved self-directed learning.

PAFE has also implemented a motivational reading program for first graders to keep them engaged in school, at home, and wherever they have time to read. Children in first grade receive a stuffed puppy that serves as a reading buddy for the year. They earn rewards (stickers, collars, sleepovers) by reading books out loud to their puppies.

The investments made by PAFE in Lake Pend Oreille kids have yielded significant returns. Once scoring far below the state average, economically disadvantaged kids in LPOSD made great gains in the ISAT language test. On the ISAT reading, LPOSD has for several years outpaced the Idaho state average in third grade reading, including for economically disadvantaged students.<sup>ii</sup> See charts below illustrating improvements in the reading and language scores for LPOSD students, compared to statewide trends.





**Van Buren Elementary, Caldwell ID**  
**School-wide literacy environment and staff collaboration**

Van Buren Elementary School has focused on creating a word-rich environment for children supported by school staff within grade levels, between grade levels, and beyond. The school-wide environment targets low levels of academic vocabulary and fluency, particularly among low-income kids, who make up a large share of students at Van Buren and the many English language learners.

Teachers in each grade level engage in 45 minutes of collaborative planning daily, while cross-grade collaboration takes place every six weeks. Professional development in literacy instruction includes paraprofessionals, as well as office, kitchen, and custodial staff. Through this established collaboration process the school-wide literacy environment can be upheld with high fidelity.

Van Buren also uses its Extended Reading Intervention program (ERI) dollars for 4.5 hours per week of afterschool time for struggling readers in the spring, allowing extra reading instruction led by kids’ regular classroom teachers. Principal Melissa Langan believes that with additional reading intervention funding, kids in grades 1-3 could be offered a full school year worth of afterschool time.

In 2012, the percentage of students at Van Buren scoring proficient or advanced on the third-grade ISAT language test increased to 73.8 % from 63.2% two years prior.<sup>iii</sup> Of the economic challenges faced by many kids and families in her school, Langan says, “We don’t see them as children living in poverty. We focus on their skills. I would say their rate of achievement is sustaining itself.”

<sup>i</sup> Letter from Superintendent Marilyn Howard, Idaho Reading Indicator Instructional Support Guide. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED483758.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> As defined by Title I status.

<sup>iii</sup> “Inside Van Buren’s Academic Turnaround,” Idaho Ed News. October 17, 2013. <http://www.idahoednews.org/featured/inside-van-burens-academic-turnaround/#.VsNRtPkrKM8>