

Research for Action - Adolescent Literacy

To apply for this fellowship, please go to the Stoneleigh site and complete the Individual Application. Send all materials to Eva Gold at 215-823-2500 ext.501 or egold@researchforaction.org.

Few advocates of low-income and minority urban youth doubt the pressing need to equip these adolescents with more sophisticated literacy skills, so that they can be successful in high school and beyond. Additionally, current literacy levels suggest that today's adolescents will have trouble participating in civic life, thus posing the improvement of literacy learning as both an educational and social dilemma.¹

Literacy is at the core of learning in the content areas. And yet, "It is estimated that about half of incoming 9th graders in urban, high-poverty schools read three years or more below grade level."² Unfortunately, many high school content area teachers have not been adequately prepared to work with students reading so far below grade level, even as there is growing awareness that bringing literacy into the content areas is crucial to student success. Recognizing this challenge, urban school leaders are now actively seeking strategies for expanding secondary teachers' repertoire of research-based literacy practices that will re-engage discouraged adolescent learners and strengthen their skills. In addition, school leaders are turning to external partners – universities, community-based organizations, social service agencies, and cultural institutions – to join them in their work with struggling adolescents.

Research for Action (RFA) seeks a Stoneleigh Fellow interested in examining the issue of adolescent literacy locally and nationally. The Fellow will conduct in-depth qualitative research in two area high schools – one in Philadelphia and one in Camden – to document the experiences of students who enter high school reading below grade level and to understand how their literacy levels impact their holistic academic experience, particularly in their content-area courses. Both schools have joined with external partners to provide professional development to content area teachers and implement intensive and motivating interventions for students. The Fellow will also complete a national scan of evidence-based policies, programs, and practices that are effectively addressing the literacy challenges of under-prepared urban and minority youth. Both sets of research activities will culminate in a highly accessible report for policy makers and practitioner that will be widely disseminated through RFA's *e*newsletter, mailing lists, and on its website. In addition, RFA will work with Stoneleigh to arrange briefings with appropriate audiences.

¹ Shanahan & Shanahan 2008

² Haynes & Levin 2009:5