



# SIM IMPACT AWARD

Central Academy Middle School • James River High School  
Liberty Middle School • Patrick Henry High School



“They have taught all of us so much about what it takes for CLC to truly make an impact. Their commitment is inspiring, and their efforts will be reflected in the successes experienced by teachers and students well beyond their schools and into the future.”

– Ann Hoffman

The 2011 SIM Impact Award honors four Virginia schools that are pioneers in their use of the Content Literacy Continuum to promote school-wide improvements in literacy for all students. James River High School and Central Academy Middle School in Botetourt County and Patrick Henry High School and Liberty Middle School in Hanover County are this year’s recipients of the award, given by the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning to recognize schools or school systems that have widely adopted many components of the Strategic Instruction Model and that have collected and analyzed data related to their efforts to improve instruction and learning with SIM.

Though other schools across the country have adopted CLC, the extent to which the Virginia schools have embraced it is groundbreaking. The CLC framework they have put in place includes features not found in other CLC projects: They make extensive use of speech-language pathologists at all five CLC levels (see our feature on this innovative approach beginning on page 21), and they have transformed relationships made possible by middle school-high school feeder patterns to create meaningful, deep collaboration across schools.

“I often refer to these schools as the bellwether schools,” says Diane Gillam, project manager. “They are the leaders not just in their state but also on a national level. They find that hard to believe.”

Supported by a series of grants, beginning in 2005, the four Virginia schools have built self-sustaining CLC programs that establish a comprehensive, consistent educational experience for students from the time they enter sixth grade until they graduate from high school. At the heart of every discussion and every decision lies the question of what is best for students.

“There is nothing more gratifying than working with enthusiastic teachers and administrators who continue to promote student success,” says Jerri Neduchal, CLC site leader in Botetourt County. “Hanover and Botetourt counties deserve this award because of their untiring commitment to improving student achievement by enhancing instruction for all students. They have embraced CLC as a way of conducting business daily.”

“Education today is in large measure a bottom-line enterprise, and what has transpired in each of these settings has led to an outstanding bottom line. When you look at the toughest measures—state assessments—there are remarkable gains.”

—Don Deshler

From the beginning, the project was ambitious, with its long-term vision of establishing feeder-pattern demonstration sites in all eight regions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Virginia Department of Education in partnership with the Center for Research on Learning chose the Botetourt and Hanover schools from a pool of applicants as the initial sites for the project.

The approach the partners took in the beginning was akin to dropping in the Green Berets, says Patty Graner, director of professional development at the Center. Barbara Ehren led the original work, supported by Rosemary Tralli and Joan Fletcher. SIM Professional Developers with years of experience, vast knowledge, and exceptional skills were deployed to build the understanding and knowledge of those schools to quickly establish use of SIM Learning Strategies and Content Enhancement Routines.

“The whole idea was to bring together people with a deep knowledge of SIM and embed those two levels of the CLC into the schools to get them started on their way to becoming CLC demonstration sites,” Graner says.

Even as the SIM special forces began their work, the schools set about building internal capacity by establishing Literacy Leadership Teams. These teams consist of teachers, who represent the diverse interests of the faculty, and the principal or a representative of the principal, who sits on the team not only to be supportive but also to become more knowledgeable about literacy issues at the secondary level. The teams serve as liaisons to faculty, soliciting opinions and suggestions from staff members, collaborating with SIM Professional Developers, and collecting and analyzing data

to identify literacy needs throughout the school. In some cases, Literacy Leadership Teams are the guiding force for a school’s literacy-centered improvement efforts and have become synonymous with school improvement team.

“There has clearly been extraordinary leadership that has demonstrated a willingness to be in this for the long haul,” says Don Deshler, director of the Center for Research on Learning. “They’ve endured dead ends. They endured when the results went flat. They endured a host of things. But unlike so many others involved in school improvement efforts, they kept their eyes focused on the agenda.”

The schools’ endurance has paid off in the form of increasing scores on state assessments and notable improvements in students’ literacy skills across the board, as illustrated in our features on the schools beginning on page 13.

“It shows that when you challenge educators, they really do rise to the occasion if you give them something that is good for kids,” says Tom Manthey, project director, Virginia Department of Education.

For the Center, the higher test scores, open collaboration, routine reliance on data to guide decisions, and broad acceptance of new instructional techniques are exciting developments. Of equal value to our future work is a look at what factors contributed to the success in the four schools.

“They have taught all of us so much about what it takes for CLC to truly make an impact,” says Ann Hoffman, CLC site leader in Hanover County. “Their commitment is inspiring, and their efforts will be reflected in the successes experienced by teachers and students well beyond their schools and into the future.”

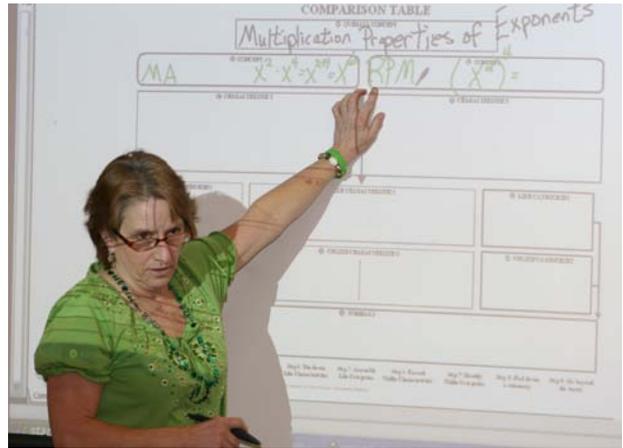
## CENTRAL ACADEMY MIDDLE SCHOOL JAMES RIVER HIGH SCHOOL BOTETOURT COUNTY, VIRGINIA

Students at James River High School and Central Academy Middle School in Botetourt County, Virginia, are the clear winners in an intense, six-year (and counting) process to develop a comprehensive, unified program to improve literacy skills and academic achievement. The schools were selected to participate in a State Personnel Development Grant in which they adopted the Content Literacy Continuum, developed by the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, as a framework for schoolwide literacy improvement.

Before 2005—the year the initial grant was awarded—30 percent of the students at Central Academy Middle School scored below proficient on the Virginia Standards of Learning state assessment for reading and writing. A closer look showed that 70 percent of students with disabilities scored below proficient, as did more than 55 percent of economically disadvantaged students.

The situation at James River High School was better—86 percent of the high school's students passed the reading assessment—but the school did not have a systematic approach to improving literacy of secondary students.

“One of the chief reasons that Botetourt County Public Schools applied for the CLC grant was the recognition of a problem area related to adolescent literacy, which was apparently not being adequately addressed by the school division,” says Superintendent Anthony Brads. “Although not misguided in the least, the division literacy focus was mainly placed on early intervention. When applying for the grant, we were looking for a vehicle to assist us with developing a comprehensive Pre-K through 12 approach to literacy. CLC has become a significant part of that process.”



Through support received from the grant, the two schools adopted CLC as their framework for an extensive school improvement effort focused on improving literacy skills of all students. In the years that followed, teachers received professional development tailored to their roles and classroom needs as well as follow-up support in Strategic Instruction Model Learning Strategies and Content Enhancement Routines. The schools developed new classes to meet students' literacy needs, and a speech-language pathologist joined the team to collaborate with all teachers at both schools and provide therapeutic intervention for students with the most severe language deficits. Literacy Leadership Teams formed to guide the schools' efforts, and collaboration across content areas, grade levels, and schools became the norm. In addition to the CLC and SIM focus on literacy, the schools also introduced block scheduling and encouraged integrating effective use of technology into instruction, resulting in many significant changes to school structure and culture in a short time. That the schools were able to juggle the changes and at the same time see dramatic increases in test scores and student achievement is a credit to the dedication of teachers and administrators alike.

“Our experience tells us that the schools and districts achieving the largest literacy gains are those with strong administrative leadership,” says Don Deshler, director of the Center for Research on Learning. “Clearly, one of the keys to the success in Botetourt County has been the cadre of committed leaders at the division and school levels.”

All five levels of the Content Literacy Continuum are in place in the Botetourt County schools. The collaboration between schools, including regularly scheduled leadership meetings focused on shared literacy issues, creates a unified experience for all students from sixth-grade through graduation.

Though CLC is firmly established, the schools continually evaluate results at all five levels as leadership teams consider how to sustain improvements to instruction and student achievement. An annual planning document specifies the interventions to be used at each level (whether SIM strategies and routines or other programs, such as *LANGUAGE!*), classes in which teachers will be expected to implement interventions, evidence of implementation, resources to support instruction or indicators that more intense instruction is necessary, and speech-language pathologist support for each level.

The thoughtfulness of the planning and persistence in pursuing improvement have resulted in exciting advances in literacy levels at the two schools.

“In the short amount of time I have been here, the impact SIM has had on CAMS is astronomical,” says Timothy McClung, who is in his second year as principal of Central Academy Middle School. “We have students who have gained over two grade levels in reading in one year. Our state accountability scores were higher in 2010 than they have ever been.”

Figures 1 and 2 show Central Academy Middle School students’ pass rates for the state assessments in reading and

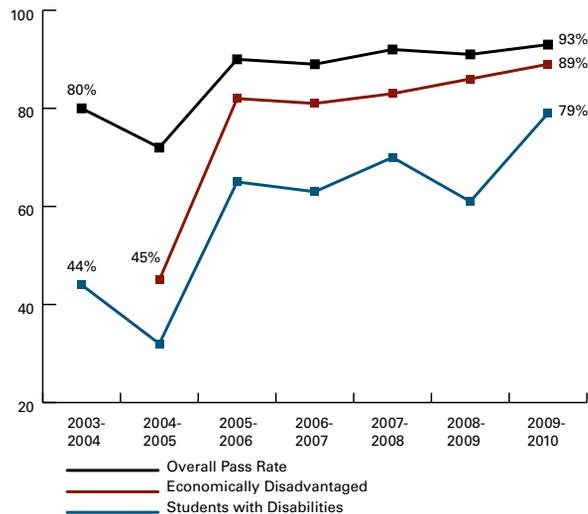


Figure 1: Central Academy Middle School Reading Pass Rates

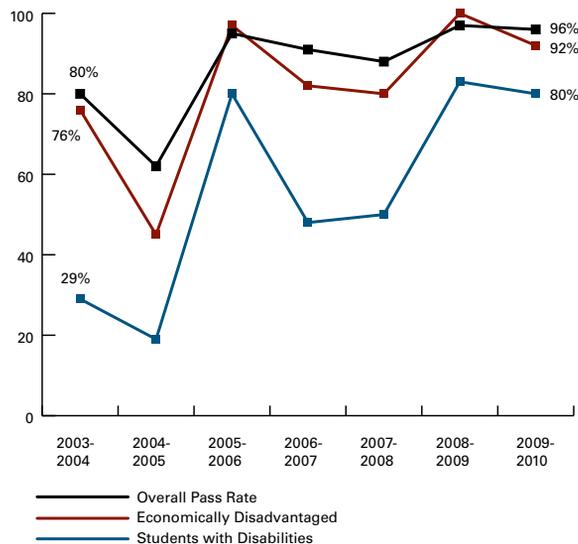


Figure 2: Central Academy Middle School Writing Pass Rates

“The transformation from a middle school student to a high school student was much easier with the help of these strategies and routines because you know what to expect from the teachers. You know that they are going to teach you much like you were taught in the years before.”

—Matthew Flint, senior, James River High School

writing. Pass rates in both reading (Figure 1) and writing (Figure 2) have improved for all students and for the subgroups of students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students.

“As a school, the biggest success has been the improvement of our eighth-grade writing scores,” says Denise Sprinkle, science teacher and building leader for the CLC project at the middle school. “We feel the incorporation of the writing strategies into our curriculum has been critical to the student gains in writing.”

James River High School has realized similar improvements on state assessments for its students. Figure 3 shows improvements in pass rates for all students in the areas of reading, math, science, and history from the 2005-2006 school year to 2009-2010. Writing pass rates remained about the same. More students are passing their reading and writing state assessments with a rating of “advanced proficiency,” as seen in Figure 4.

“We now have a common goal—to improve literacy for all students—and we are reaching that goal. The Con-

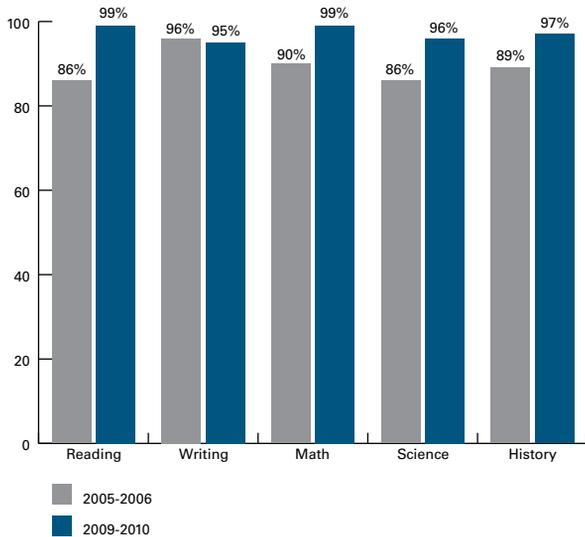


Figure 3: James River High School Pass Rates by Content Area

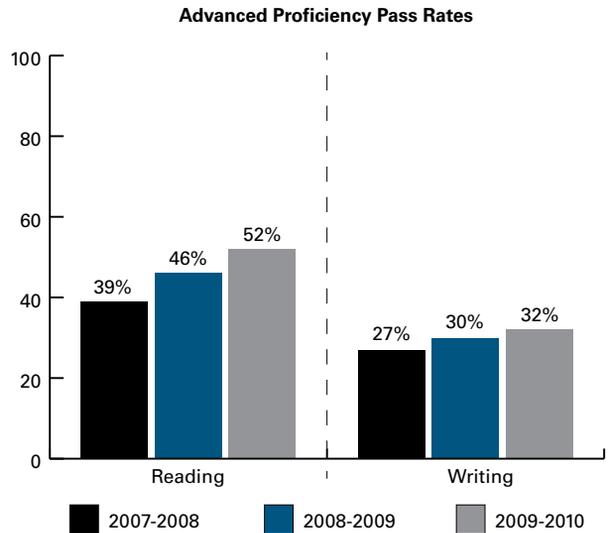


Figure 4: James River High School Advanced Proficiency Pass Rates

tent Enhancement Routines and Learning Strategies have been the foundation for the schoolwide change,” says Dana McCaleb, special education teacher, building leader for the project, and SIM Professional Developer at James River High School.

Teachers and administrators are justifiably proud of the improvements they are seeing in their students’ literacy skills. They also note personal benefits in professional and collegial growth, including more open communication and more opportunities to collaborate

not just within schools but across schools. At James River High School, principal Jamie Talbott credits CLC with improving communication across departments and creating positive collaboration among teachers, both of which he says have led to improved classroom instruction and student achievement. Sprinkle, at the middle school, believes communication is one of her biggest responsibilities. “As the building lead, communication with all levels of administration is crucial. Communication with fellow teachers and listening to their concerns is part of what I do,” she says.

Extending collaboration between schools means the educators have regular opportunities to discuss student progress—including students’ transition from middle school to

high school—and the effectiveness of instructional methods across all grade levels.

“The collaboration has allowed us to better meet the needs of our incoming students, providing services for them to meet their literacy levels and improve literacy across the board,” says McCaleb.

Central Academy Middle School and James River High School have met the thorny challenge of improving student literacy with an admirable tenaciousness and a determined

focus on the needs of their students, realizing exceptional gains in student achievement in the process. They also have created a literacy-centric culture, owned by all teachers and administrators, that will continue to serve the best interests of the schools and their students well into the future.

“I have witnessed the growth of principals and teachers into such strong instructional leaders,” says Joni Poff, the division’s

supervisor of secondary instruction and gifted education. “To sit back and watch a CLC team meeting take place in a school is fascinating. The level of the conversation, the knowledge of the members, and the focus of the team are incredible.”



## **LIBERTY MIDDLE SCHOOL PATRICK HENRY HIGH SCHOOL HANOVER COUNTY, VIRGINIA**

In six years, Liberty Middle School and Patrick Henry High School have crafted a new culture of literacy “connectedness” that forges strong bonds between professional development and instruction, between high school demands and middle school preparation, between student needs and student services.

The two schools in Hanover County, Virginia, were selected to participate in a State Personnel Development Grant in which they adopted the Content Literacy Continuum, developed by the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, as a framework for schoolwide literacy improvement.

“When we started, we just knew we had schoolwide literacy issues. Over the past six years, we’ve made strong gains,” says Donald Latham, principal of Liberty Middle School. “You have art teachers thinking about literacy, com-

puter science teachers thinking about literacy. It’s all of the small contributions that equal a schoolwide effort.”

Jeffrey Crook, principal of Patrick Henry High School, sees evidence of the CLC culture change reflected throughout the school in new attitudes about literacy and new approaches to the daily business of teaching and learning. “All faculty, staff, and students are focused on literacy and the importance of understanding and synthesizing information in the classroom,” he says. “All faculty members realize that the use of integrated Content Enhancement Routines and strategies leads to improved overall student achievement.”

Both schools collect data from multiple sources—walk-throughs, formal observations, state assessment results—to guide instructional decisions. In addition, the desire to improve literacy across the board has brought teachers and in-house professional developers together in a way that allows for collaborative feedback and instructional growth.

Beyond the schools’ individual achievements, the Patrick Henry and Liberty Middle Literacy Leadership Teams



work in partnership to develop and support a comprehensive secondary literacy plan. That collaboration, identified by school leaders as one of the most important outgrowths of the initiative, has intensified staff members' feelings of responsibility for all students' long-term success. High school staff prepare for the needs of their future students based on conversations with and data shared by the middle school, and middle school staff regularly check on the progress of students who have moved on.

"We ask the high school how they're doing, what they're doing, and what we can do to send them better prepared," says Latham. This year, high school teachers proctored a writing exercise for middle school students, creating a win-win situation in which middle school faculty will use results to determine whether changes are needed to prepare students better for high school and high school faculty will become acquainted with the literacy levels and skills of incoming ninth-graders.

A small—but growing—team of in-house professional developers is integral to the success of the CLC initiative in Hanover County. The team endeavors to ensure clear, strong connections between workshops, instructional goals, data collection, and follow-up coaching in the Hanover County schools.

"It's that constant follow through and it's the consistency that makes it so good," Latham says. "We go through the cycle of data collection and evaluation on a monthly basis with teacher leaders. Having that cadre of expertise added to the leadership team is just invaluable."

The six years of intense work toward full adoption of CLC has not been without hiccups. "At first, the biggest challenge was getting 'buy in,'" says Cathy Guillena, special education teacher and lead SIM Professional Developer at the high school. Guillena recalls the initial resistance of her collaborative teacher at Patrick Henry High School,

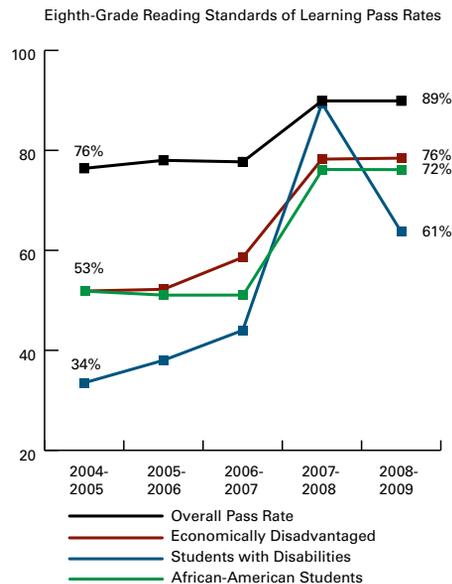


Figure 1: Liberty Middle School Reading Pass Rates

who thought the CLC initiative might be “just the latest craze” destined to disappear in a few years like so many other changes she had seen in more than 20 years of teaching. “She ended up being one of our biggest cheerleaders,” Guillena says.

Administrators led the way toward acceptance by establishing the expectation for teachers to learn about and use Strategic Instruction Model interventions. Teachers identified as leaders among their peers became, like Guillena's colleague, cheerleaders for the project. Now, use of strategies and routines in classrooms is the norm, and the schools have devised new approaches to reaching students who need extra literacy assistance. Patrick Henry cleared one big hurdle when, after several years of urging, the school board approved a new Learning Strategies course to be taught by the speech-language pathologist to address the most severe learning difficulties of students in content classes.

Since beginning the project, the schools have seen rising scores on the state's Standards of Learning assessments. Figure 1 shows increases in eighth-grade reading pass rates from the 2004-2005 school year to 2008-2009. Not only do the scores show improvements for eighth-graders as a whole, but they also show significant gains when subgroups (African-American students, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students) are considered separately. Eighth-grade writing pass rates also improved for all groups during the same period.

"We've seen our overall reading scores go up," says Latham (Figure 2). "Our math scores have gone up. Science is the highest it's ever been."

The percentage of special education students at the middle school who spend most of their school day in general education classrooms has increased substantially since 2006, while the percentage of special education students who spend most of the day in other settings has decreased just as dramatically (Figure 3).

High school pass rates for reading and math have increased (see Figure 4). The percentage of students reading below grade level has decreased, and the percentage of students reading above grade level has increased. Strikingly, the percentage of students who graduate with advanced diplomas has risen from below 10 percent to nearing 20 percent (see Figure 5).

Behind the numbers and statistics are powerful student and teacher stories, stories such as teacher Stacy Stanford's determination to help a student master the content in her Spanish class despite struggling with reading comprehension in English. Stanford designed a multi-intervention approach using the *Framing Routine* and *Paraphrasing Strategy* to attack readings for the Spanish class and the *Vocabulary LINC-ing Routine* to master new Spanish words. By the end of the

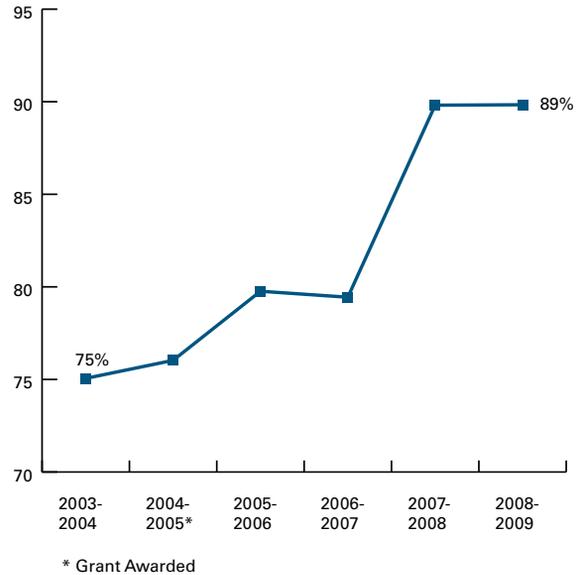


Figure 2: Liberty Middle School Reading Pass Rates: All Students

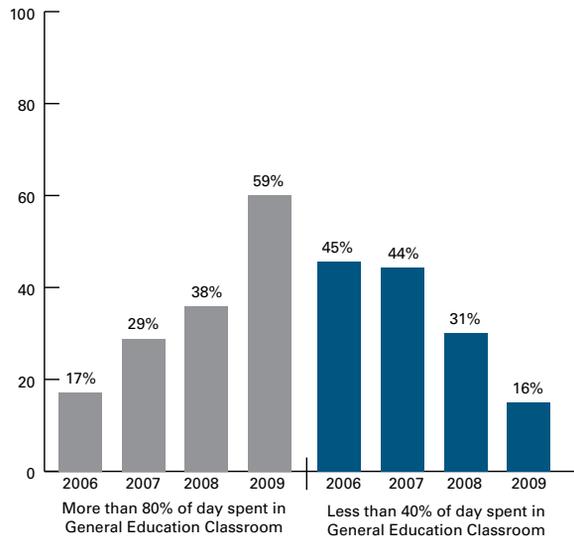


Figure 3: Liberty Middle School Percentage of Special Education Students in General Education Classrooms

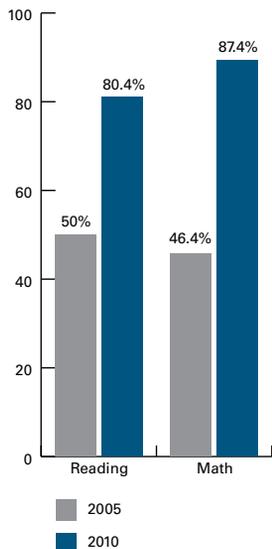


Figure 4: Patrick Henry High School Pass Rates

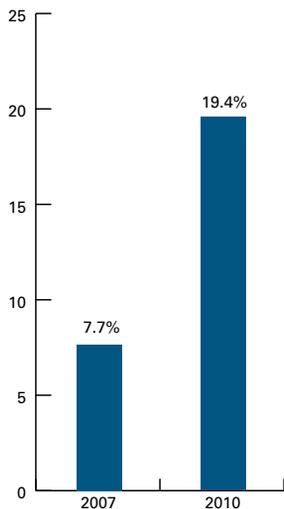


Figure 5: Students with Disabilities Receiving Advanced Diplomas

year, the student demonstrated great leaps in her comprehension abilities in both Spanish and English.

“Just because she struggled in English didn’t mean she had to struggle in Spanish as well,” says Stanford, who is World Languages department chair and a CLC teacher leader at Patrick Henry High School.

A common twist in the stories emerging from these Hanoover County schools is the teacher who needs to see proof in her own classroom before fully embracing CLC and SIM. Janie Brown, physical science teacher at Liberty Middle School, was just such a teacher. For Brown, evidence of success came early when she used the *Unit Organizer Routine* to introduce her first unit, Map Skills. Brown says she dreaded the Map Skills unit test because her students generally performed poorly—many Cs, with a number of Ds and Fs. The year she used *Unit Organizer*, though, the results impressed her.

“The majority of my grades were in the B range and a good amount in the A range,” she says, and students attributed their success to the *Unit Organizer*. “It felt like everything they needed to know was laid out for them with no hidden content.”

Brown is now a SIM Professional Developer and CLC project co-lead in her school. “You see steady gain every year, but more importantly, I see students who come to class with tools and strategies to learn,” she says. “These give them confidence and have allowed them to feel more confident in tackling new and difficult subject matter. True student achievement is creating effective life-long learners, and isn’t that what we are all about?”

## SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS

Virginia's CLC project includes one key piece that has been under-represented in previous projects: A central role for speech-language pathologists.

From the beginning, the developers of the Content Literacy Continuum envisioned speech-language pathologists working alongside teachers and administrators to provide comprehensive literacy services to students. Until now, though, most CLC projects have not realized the full potential of SLPs.

"It's so unusual to have a speech-language pathologist at the secondary level," says Patty Graner, director of professional development at the Center for Research on Learning. "These school communities *do* have speech-language pathologists, and they're using them in a way that provides better services to kids overall."

The speech-language pathologists in the Hanover and Botetourt schools work at all levels of the Content Literacy Continuum to help other educators identify the language variables related to literacy and learning problems. Their work may involve demonstration teaching, intervention instruction, or collaboration with two aims: raise awareness of the role of language in literacy and identify students who are having problems achieving for language reasons.

"They are using speech-language pathologists in a way that is really ground breaking and quite exciting," says Barbara Ehren, professor and director of the doctoral program at the University of Central Florida and KU's original project coordinator for the Virginia project. "Language is a part of learning. Past first grade, very few teachers really pay attention to language."

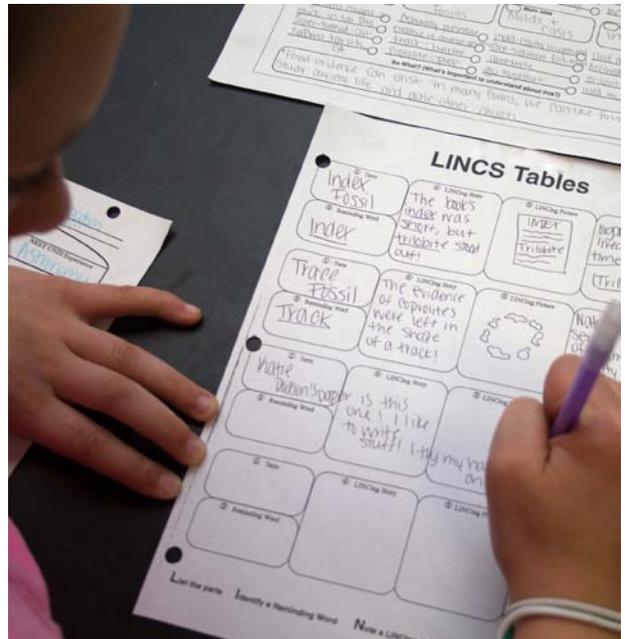
Kim McCallister is the speech-language pathologist at Liberty Middle School in Hanover County. Most of her time is spent working in Levels 3-5, including handling a caseload of 25 students who have individualized education

programs (Level 5). However, she also consults with teachers about making Levels 1 and 2 more "language friendly" and works with general education students who need short-term explicit instruction as they work toward improved literacy.

"It is exciting to be on the proactive end rather than waiting for students to have difficulty and get services solely through an IEP," she says.

McCallister was a staunch supporter of CLC from the beginning. "I had worked with students in grades 3-5 who required additional support to master reading comprehension skills and fully understood the value of intensive and explicit instruction to address this deficit," she says.

Susan Trumbo is the speech-language pathologist serving both Central Academy Middle School and James River High School in Botetourt County, where she works with some of the same students she knew in her previous assignment at two of Botetourt's elementary schools.



“When I was approached about this position six years ago, I was uncertain as to what my role would encompass,” she says.

Once she began working in the CLC setting, though, she became a firm believer in the value of the speech-language pathologist’s role in secondary literacy. Like McCallister, Trumbo has a caseload of 25 students but may work with 80 to 100 students across all five levels of the CLC in any given week.

“Support of staff and administration with flexibility in scheduling is a critical factor,” she says. “My schedule may change weekly and sometimes even daily because it is student-driven.”

The transformation of the speech-language pathologist role in Botetourt and Hanover is a departure from the traditional model. Before CLC, McCallister saw IEP students in a pull-out model, spending only part of her day at Liberty before moving on to another school.

“There was no time to build trust for collaboration or consultation, no time for working beside teachers to improve classroom performance, and as a result, there was little buy-in for the SLP role in literacy,” she says. “I think that only by being involved on a daily basis with the staff and students can this credibility develop.”

Now, teachers and SLPs work together to address the language and literacy needs of their students.

“I believe the SLP’s main role has been to break down the language barrier that our non-IEP students possess,” says Janie Brown, CLC project co-lead and physical science

teacher at Liberty Middle School. “Most teachers knew some of their kids didn’t get the information but weren’t sure how to tackle that because they had no formal language education. Many of us now are more cognizant of the language we teach.”

Trumbo, who uses SIM interventions in almost all of the services she provides to students, would not be comfortable with a return to the traditional model of speech-language service delivery.

“I feel that the most challenging, valuable, and rewarding work I have done is in the secondary setting through the CLC framework,” she says.



# SPECIAL THANKS

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Thank you to the faculty and staff of Central Academy Middle School, James River High School, Liberty Middle School, and Patrick Henry High School for their hard work and dedication to improving adolescent literacy. A special thanks to those listed below for their exceptional leadership.

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*Joni Poff, Supervisor of Instruction, SIM Professional Developer*

*Diana Dixon, Former Director of Instruction*

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*Tammy Ferris, Teacher Leader*

*Pam Kettelson, Teacher Leader*

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*Denise Sprinkle, Teacher Leader,*

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*Philip King, Teacher Leader*

*Leah Lorton, Teacher Leader, SIM Professional Developer*

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*Teresa Simmons, Teacher Leader,*

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*Dreama McMillan, Former Assistant Principal*

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Chris Belcher, *SIM Professional Developer*

Karin Caskey, *Teacher Leader*

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### VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SUPPORT

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and Students Services*

Patricia Abrams, *Director of Special Education,  
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### VIRGINIA TECH/TAC SUPPORT

Helen Barrier, *SIM Professional Developer*

Ben Tickle, *SIM Professional Developer*