**CENTER FOR URBAN SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS @ TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY**

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**Teacher Tip VOLUME 4**

**01/2025**

**The “GIST” of the reading comprehension**

**problem in grades 4 and 5**

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Summarized are the results of an important study reporting on student test performance, teacher competency, and teacher instructional practices. Lack of elementary reading comprehension skills have been linked to deleterious outcomes throughout life. Though numerous solutions offer promising results, there have been no significant changes in students’ reading outcomes. For example, across Texas, students in grades 4 and 5 continually score significantly lower on foundational main idea and summarization skills than on other comprehension skills. To investigate the cause of this problem, the authors recruited 155 teachers within a large economically and culturally diverse school district in Texas. Teacher competency was measured using a main idea task and teacher survey. The results showed that instructional practices are often used that are not evidence-based. Teachers showed moderate competency for writing main ideas after professional development. Teacher knowledge and evidence-based instructional practices are critical to student comprehension outcomes.

**Reports on prevalent reading comprehension instructional methods, materials, and tools:**

* 48% of teachers reported using summaries to promote comprehension, but without explicit instruction for generating them.
* Only 58% of instructional strategies used are recognized by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) for having some evidence.
* Only 5% of resources used have research indicating a positive impact on student outcomes.
* Only 2 out of 9 computer programs are recognized by the WWC for having small evidence on student outcomes.
* 21% of teachers reported teaching text structures daily.

**Teacher main idea competency:**

* Following professional development, the average teacher main idea score was 5.8 on a scale of 1–8.
* More than 80% of teachers with an acceptable main idea wrote sentences directly from the passage without author attribution or putting the ideas in their own words (as was modeled during professional development).
* 90% of those who did not score at least a 4 on the main idea task simply noted the name of the event mentioned in the article.

**Recommendations for teachers:**

* Select materials and resources based on evidence of effectiveness
* Engage in professional learning on evidence-based instructional frameworks

**Recommendations for principals:**

* Support evidence-based practices by promoting and providing resources with evidence of positive student outcomes.
* Improve teacher knowledge by ensuring teachers have access to professional development on evidence-based practices.