

FOCUS ON

IMPROVING ADOLESCENT LITERACY



A TRENDS IN AMERICA SPECIAL REPORT



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Executive Summary

- ▶ Many middle and high school students lack the literacy skills necessary to be successful in their classes and beyond high school. Only 29 percent of America's eighth-grade public school students meet the National Assessment of Educational Progress standard of reading proficiency for their grade level, according to the U.S. Department of Education. That's important because poor reading skills are considered a key factor in the decision by many students to drop out of school.
- ▶ Poor literacy skills impact society in many ways. One study reveals that one-third of all juvenile offenders read below the fourth-grade level. Research also concludes that one-third of high school graduates are not ready to succeed in an introductory-level college writing course. Eight percent of entering college students are required to take at least one remedial reading course. According to the Council on Competitiveness, an organization comprised of business, labor and university leaders working to ensure U.S. prosperity, employers believe more than half of recent high school graduates are weak in literacy skills.
- ▶ While America's fourth grade reading scores are among the best in the world, by the time they reach 10th grade, U.S. students score among the lowest in the world, according to a report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics. A Carnegie Corporation of New York report, *Time to Act*, concludes adolescents in grades four to 12 are not receiving adequate literacy training in all subject areas and many teachers lack the preparation and skills necessary to teach literacy skills.
- ▶ Although many strategies to improve literacy skills require action at the school or district level, there are several actions state policymakers can take to promote improved adolescent literacy skills. These policies include improved data tracking systems, higher standards for teacher certification and pre-service teacher education programs, and providing local education agencies with resources to identify and assist students who are reading below grade level.

About the Author

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The Faces Of Illiteracy

Michelle Robinson



Michelle Robinson, 40, reads on a second-grade level. She grew up in a low-income home in suburban Detroit and dropped out of school when she was a high school junior. Robinson said a big part of her problem was that she suffers from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, commonly known as ADHD, and never received medication that might have helped her focus on her schoolwork.

She also asserts, however, that teachers never took the time to work with her to improve her poor reading skills. She attended several school districts in the Detroit area, and claims she never received any intervention.

"Every one of those teachers, when I went to them to get some help to learn to read, they only gave me a book and said, 'You try it yourself.' And that made me feel like they didn't care," she said. "So I left."

Since quitting school, Robinson has managed to work as a nurse's aide at a nursing home and later a group home for people with disabilities, jobs that didn't require her to have a high level of reading skills. She wants to become a registered nurse but clearly needs to improve her literacy skills first. Consequently, she has enrolled at the Siena Literacy Center in Detroit, hoping to learn to read on a level that will allow her to move ahead in life.

E.J. Eide

When E.J. Eide dropped out of Maplewood High School in Nashville in the 10th grade, he was reading on a second-grade level. One of four children in a military family that moved frequently, Eide was held back in school at least twice but eventually was promoted to the next grade despite having reading skills that were



practically nonexistent. Even now, at age 48, Eide struggles to make sense of a book that is written on a third-grade level. Throughout school, Eide failed course after course due to his poor literacy skills. Today he candidly admits it's the reason he lost interest in school and ultimately dropped out.

"All of the other kids were better than me and made fun of me and I got disinterested, because they didn't have classes back then for kids like me," he said. "At first they tried to work with me on my reading, but I wouldn't have anything to do with it. I didn't care. I gave up."

Eide calls himself a functioning alcoholic, struggling to hold down a job. He is continually in and out of homeless shelters. Looking back on his life, Eide, whose face is unshaven and whose reddish blonde hair falls below his shoulders, now wants to earn a GED, but his poor reading skills are a barrier that he must first overcome.

"Right now it's more or less everything to me," he insists. "I want to be able to get a job ... and have money to retire or else I'll be back on the streets again. And I won't be able to do that unless I can further my reading and writing."

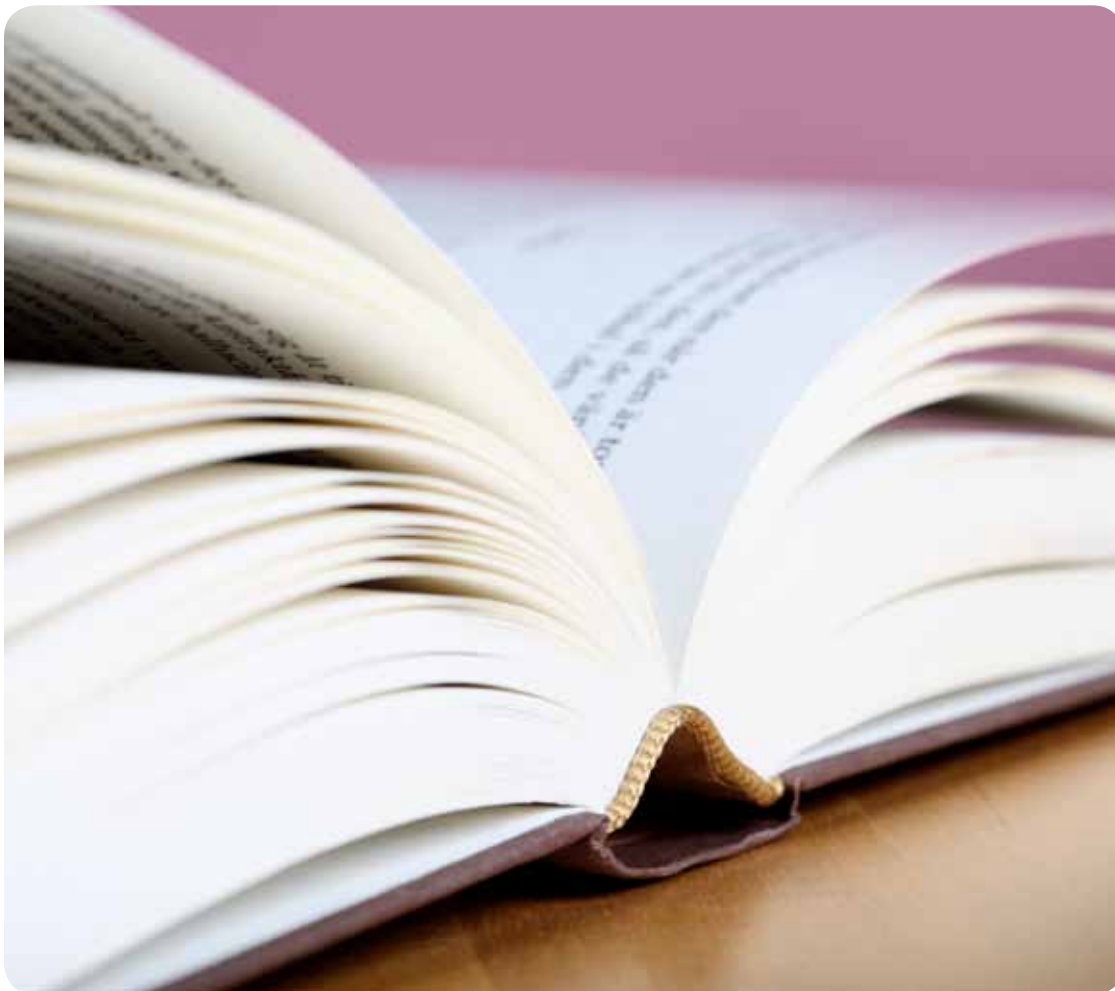
When he was just 14, Eide was charged with more than 60 counts of burglary. Since then, he has spent more than 10 years in prison. That's hardly exceptional. According to a 2007 study by the National Association of State Boards of Education, approximately two-thirds of prison inmates are high school dropouts and one-third of all juvenile offenders read below the fourth grade level.

Eide took some literacy classes in prison, but they did little to help his reading skills. Finally, in an effort to turn his life around, Eide turned to Operation Read in Lexington, Ky., where he has begun the process of learning reading skills that, by all measures, he should have developed 40 years ago.

Both of these stories represent an extreme case of a middle-aged adult unable to read beyond a second- or third-grade level. But the problem isn't limited to adults—it's a problem that begins in childhood. And clearly, the culprit for many children who fail to learn to read in school are not teachers, but policies at the state and local levels which discourage teaching literacy after the third grade.

Nationally, the number of students who are unable to read at their grade level is alarming. In today's global economy, literacy skills are widely viewed as essential to prepare students for college or the workplace. The lack of literacy skills has become a threat to American economic competitiveness. Without significant reforms that address adolescent literacy skills, many students will be condemned to lives like Eide and Robinson.

It is important to note that from an academic viewpoint, literacy means more than merely the ability to read words on a page. Literacy involves the ability to comprehend and process the words on a high level. The lack of literacy—not typically referred to as illiteracy when applied to adolescents—refers to students who read several grades below their own grade level. Furthermore, each subject area in school has specific literacy skills that are unique to that subject. For example, math students need to be able to read and comprehend increasingly complex charts and graphs.



The Adolescent Literacy Crisis In America

Elementary schools in the U.S. have a successful track record of teaching literacy skills in early grades. Compared to other nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reports U.S. students in fourth grade have among the best reading scores in the world. However, UNESCO also reports that by 10th grade, U.S. students score among the lowest in the world.

What's behind the seeming freefall in adolescent literacy is the subject of a recent report by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success*. It examines factors responsible for a decline in adolescent literacy scores and recommends policies and strategies that can be enacted and implemented at the federal, state and local levels to address the issue.



Less than one-third of America's eighth-grade public school students meet the National Assessment of Educational Progress standard of reading proficiency for their grade level, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Furthermore, that data shows while fourth-grade reading proficiency rates increased between 1998 through 2007, the percentage of eighth graders who score at or above the proficient level declined. A mere 2 percent of eighth-graders read at an advanced level, according to U.S. Department of Education data.

"The bad news is all the data is correct," Mel Riddile of the National Association of Secondary School Principals said. "Half of entering ninth-graders cannot read their textbooks. They are not illiterate. They can read the words, but they can't process their meaning on a higher level."

Riddile served as principal at a high school in Falls Church, Va., that improved from a failing high school to an award-winning one in four years by changing methods for teaching literacy skills.

Table one provides a comparison of eighth grade National Assessment of Educational Progress test scores for each state. The scores on the table are disaggregated according to gender, race and socioeconomic groupings. They show alarming disparities among each group. Specifically:

- ▶ Eighth-grade girls on average score more than 10 points higher than boys;
- ▶ White students score on average approximately 27 points higher than African-Americans and 25 points higher than Hispanics; and
- ▶ Students who qualify for free and reduced-price school lunch score on average 23 points lower than their more affluent counterparts who do not qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

Numerous studies shed light on the problems associated with adolescent literacy disparities and the effect poor adolescent literacy has on preparedness for postsecondary education and the workforce.

In *Re-conceptualizing Extra Help for High School Students in a High Standards Era*, Robert Balfanz and other authors on the report concluded that about half of incoming ninth-graders in urban, high-poverty schools read three years or more below grade level. Furthermore, according to a Department of Education study, a mere 15 percent of low-income eighth-graders read at or above a proficient level.

The lack of adolescent literacy has far-reaching impacts. Roughly one-third of high school graduates are not ready to succeed in an introductory-level college writing course, according to American College Testing's *Crisis at the Core: Preparing All Students for College and Work*.

At the nation's four-year colleges, nearly 8 percent of all entering students are required to take at least one remedial reading course and only about one-third of those students are likely to graduate within eight years, according to a Department of Education report.

Former Virginia Delegate Kristen Amundson said, "Not surprisingly at all, kids who can't meet the ACT college-ready benchmark in reading do horribly on the math and science portions of the test. You can't do math if you can't read." The data supports her. Among students who failed to meet the ACT reading benchmark for college readiness in 2006, only 16 percent met the college benchmark in math and only 5 percent in science.

Even students who are not college-bound lack literacy skills needed to be successful in the workplace, according to multiple studies. Achieve Inc., an education think tank, states in *Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work?*, that approximately 40 percent of high school graduates lack the literacy skills that employers seek.

As educational and financial experts predict jobs in the future will demand increased numbers of students with a postsecondary education, clearly state policymakers as well as local educators have critical roles in identifying, enacting and implementing policies and programmatic strategies to improve literacy education, particularly in middle and high schools.

Keys to Improving Adolescent Literacy

Although most state policymakers are not involved in daily literacy instruction, it is important for policymakers to understand research-based strategies to improve adolescent literacy in order to identify, enact and implement state-level policies and programs to support adolescent literacy programs that will prove most successful.

One of the most fundamental changes recommended by the Carnegie Corporation's *Time to Act* is expanding literacy efforts to include teaching literacy in all grades and in all content

areas. That's a departure from a historical literacy education approach often referred to as inoculation. Just as an inoculation is given to young children to provide lifetime protection against diseases, America's schools have traditionally used an "inoculation strategy" to teach only young children to read, according to *Time to Act*. Through a program known as *Reading First*, teachers in kindergarten through third grade have used research-based instructional practices to teach young children literacy skills needed to be successful in later grades. While *Reading First* is widely credited with success on fourth grade national reading assessments, our educational system has not successfully built upon it in later grades, according to *Time to Act*.

"The skills that students learn up until fourth grade are absolutely critical to later success, but they are simply not enough. Adolescent literacy is a shifting landscape where the heights get higher, the inclines steeper and the terrain rockier," *Time to Act* asserts.

Andrés Henríquez is program officer and manager of the Advancing Literacy Initiative at the Carnegie Corporation of New York. "The idea was for many years that if you teach kids how to read, they read for life. It's a misconception," he said. Henríquez stated our education system has historically invested federal and state dollars on literacy programs in early grades, while doing little to emphasize literacy in middle and high schools.

Time to Act stresses that beyond fourth grade, students must read more complicated texts, summarize these texts in writing, conduct independent research, and generally expand their reading and writing abilities in each grade in school and across all content areas, not just in language arts classes, where literacy is historically taught.

"Yet our schools are falling short in these critical areas, with the result that many adolescents are either dropping out of school or graduating unprepared for the challenges of higher education, employment and citizenship," *Time to Act* concludes.

But one barrier to teaching literacy across content areas in many places is convincing social studies, math and science teachers, among others, that they also must teach students literacy skills. *Time to Act* stresses that content area teachers must be prepared to support literacy skills of students who have mastered basic reading skills

but who struggle with the more sophisticated demands of reading within their content areas.

Some states have encountered significant push-back from content area teachers who believe their jobs involve teaching a particular subject, such as science, math or social studies, rather than to spend class time teaching literacy. Consequently, some policymakers warn that states should expect initial resistance from content area teachers. Mary Jane Kurabinski, the director of language arts literacy education at the New Jersey Department of Education, had to sell the idea of teaching literacy skills to content area teachers in her state.

“There’s a protection of their content areas, and rightfully so,” she said. “What they initially say to us is, ‘I have to get through this social studies curriculum and I have a very limited time in which to do it. I can’t be concentrating on all these other things.’” It’s a shift in policy, she said. Kurabinski tells teachers, “You don’t have to become a teacher of reading, but it is a content area teacher’s responsibility to build vocabulary and comprehension in the area that you know best.”

A Brown University report, *Adolescent Literacy Resources: Linking Research and Practice* states, “Despite what we know, there is a large breach between research and practice—and a marked resistance on the part of many middle and high schools to focus on literacy support at the dis-

trict, school or even departmental level. And, therefore, despite the urgency, there is limited understanding of how to bring these effective literacy strategies to life in the content-area classroom in ways that will make a positive difference for students.”

Some local district strategies that Time to Act recommends state policymakers support include professional development targeted to teaching and reinforcing adolescent literacy skills and funding literacy coaches to work with content area teachers on ways they can help students improve literacy skills in all grades and in all subjects.

Creating a system that requires students to read an increased number of pages each year is also an important strategy to prepare students for post-secondary education, according to Laurie Lee, middle school literacy coordinator for a reading initiative, Just Read, Florida, which Time to Act points to as one of the nation’s exemplary adolescent literacy programs.

“Often a freshman walks into a class in college and the professor says, ‘You have to read 300 pages by next Wednesday,’ and they just totally freak out because they’re not used to handling the quantity of text that they need to be able to handle (in college),” Lee explained. “That’s one of the things we’re working on is to make sure that our kids have that endurance.”



Although the implementation of many of these strategies will come at the school and district levels, Henríquez said it's important for state policymakers to help support these teaching strategies and offer technical assistance, when required.

"They need to build capacity about adolescent literacy," he said. "I think too many states don't understand how important it is for the progress of their students. I think they need to support district leaders who are trying to work this out and begin to demand that districts have K-12 district literacy plans. And they need to figure out ways that they can measure the progress of literacy throughout kindergarten through twelfth grade."

According to the Education Commission of the States, state support for local literacy plans emphasizes their importance. "Support can be a cadre of state department staff offering guidance in drawing up the plan, state convening of regional literacy summits, or monetary supports for research materials. This differs from state support of professional development for teachers where teachers attain the skills to diagnose reading problems and better help students," according to the commission. Its database shows at least 11 states provide support for local literacy plans. Five states have efforts in practice, but not specifically stated in policy (see page 8).

Recommended Actions For State Policymakers

Time to Act points out that states with targeted funding for adolescent literacy interventions are seeing positive benefits for their efforts. The report cites a 2007 study from the Center for Educational Policy that shows that Delaware, Kansas, Massachusetts and New Jersey have each made targeted investments in adolescent literacy and have seen significant gains in eighth grade reading scores on both national and state assessments.

Time to Act also lists the following actions state policymakers can take to support adolescent literacy efforts:

- ▶ Align the content of state standards to models promoted by the International Reading Association adolescent literacy coaching standards (available at: http://www.reading.org/downloads/resources/597coaching_standards.pdf) and the American Diploma Project's high school standards (available at: <http://www.achieve.org/node/331>).
- ▶ Align the challenge level of statewide reading assessments to National Assessment of Educational Progress standards and to states making progress on those national outcomes, such as Florida and Massachusetts, in order to move toward a common, national understanding of literacy expectations.
- ▶ Work to revise teacher certification standards, content of pre-service teacher education programs and professional development and support to districts. According to the Education Commission of the States, at least 17 states strengthened the teacher preparation/certification requirements to reflect adolescent literacy. A list of those states can be accessed at <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=1710>
- ▶ Define and provide mechanisms for districts and schools to identify and intervene with middle and high school students who are not demonstrating grade-level literacy skills within specific content areas, as well as across all content areas.
- ▶ Require credit-bearing reading intervention classes for students who are reading two or more years behind grade level. Fund all the elements essential to making those classes effective, including diagnostic assessments, hiring teachers to teach those classes, and providing professional development for those teachers and the broader school faculty. According to an Education Commission of the States database, at least 23 states provide student interventions when a student's reading skills are not improving.
- ▶ Build statewide data systems to ensure that data collected from districts are captured in a central place. Enable links between district databases so that assessments and instructional plans are available when students cross district lines. In some states, this will mean introducing or upgrading the data management system and providing guidance on how to access, analyze and interpret available data.
- ▶ Develop a system of tracking the Response to Intervention approach shown by students receiving supportive or intervention services, in order to maintain accountability and to improve the system over time.
- ▶ States that have already launched adolescent literacy initiatives should institutionalize them while conducting ongoing evaluations to ensure they continue to work well.

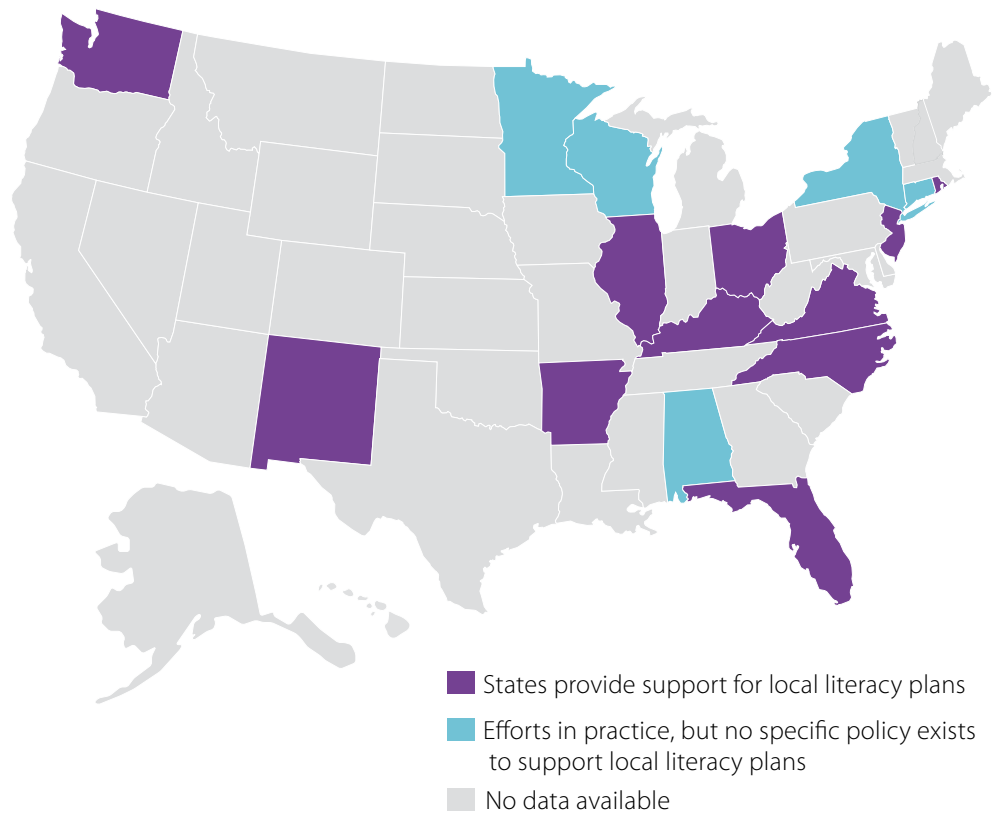
Henríquez explained the importance of creating data systems to track the reading needs of individual students and progress of literacy systems in states,” he said. “What we don’t have is basically what the reading level of those kids are after the third grade or so. Teachers, particularly at the secondary level need to understand the struggles of those students and the way in which they need to attack the problem. So it just needs to be a much more robust system of that kind of literacy data, but also an opportunity to perform what we might call formative testing.”

He also pointed to model pre-service teacher education programs at the University of Michigan and Columbia University that require education students to enroll in literacy courses in addition to their subject area content courses. “Basically, we’re training our teachers without any exposure

to the literacy challenges that students are having in their social studies and science classes,” Henríquez noted about traditional pre-service education programs. He continued:

“What’s happening in schools of education ... is that we have teachers that are highly trained in their domains without a real understanding of the literacy demands that it takes to teach their content. If you’re a science teacher, you’re trained very well in the scientific method and you’re trained very well in inquiry. You’re trained very well in ways to do inquiry in the classroom and the way to handle the learning progression between biology and chemistry and physics. But what you’re not taught are the nuances of the difficulties of getting kids who may be two or three years behind, and how to make them comfortable with reading texts within science and how to think like a scientist. Well, if you want to have

States Providing Support for Local Literacy Plans



Source: Education Commission of the States

someone think like a scientist ... you really need to prepare those teachers with the idea that kids may not have that easy of a time reading and understanding (the text)."

In addition to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, several organizations representing state policymakers addressed the need for actions to improve adolescent literacy. In its issue brief, *Supporting Adolescent Literacy Achievement*, released in 2009, the National Governors Association recommends five policy strategies:

- ▶ Build support for a state focus on adolescent literacy;
- ▶ Raise literacy expectations across the curriculum;
- ▶ Encourage and support school and district literacy plans;
- ▶ Build educators' capacity to provide adolescent literacy instruction; and
- ▶ Measure progress in adolescent literacy at the school, district and state levels.

Barbara Elzie, interim director of Just Read Florida, agrees that state-level policymakers must play an important role in supporting district and school-level adolescent literacy reforms.

"I think it's essential that states establish policies that support adolescent literacy," she said. "... That has been the success of Just Read Florida, strong state policy, laws, state board rules, that went into place to ensure that there's professional development for those teachers, that those students are in intense reading interventions, if that's what's needed for them."

The National Association of State Boards of Education report, *From State Policy to Classroom Practice: Improving Literacy Instruction for All Students*, explains how states and districts can exercise policy levers and leadership to generate improvement in literacy instruction.

- ▶ State policymakers must become well-grounded in the issues—what's at stake, the research base in literacy instruction, and the roles that must be played at all levels, including the state, districts, schools, teachers and higher education. "It is critical to secure agreements from these stakeholders about what is worth achieving, and set in motion those policies and practices that will enable people to learn what they must do to improve how teachers and students learn and apply literacy skills to content area learning," the report states.

- ▶ States must craft comprehensive literacy plans that provide all students with reading and writing instruction across the curriculum, as well as a continuum of supports and interventions for struggling readers.
- ▶ States must take a comprehensive approach to ensure the training and supports for teachers improves the quality of key dimensions of instruction linked with improving literacy achievement and content learning, including:
 - Alignment of content standards, curricula and assessments;
 - Use of formative assessment to identify student needs and monitor the efficacy of instruction;
 - Use of research-based literacy support strategies in all content areas;
 - Quality professional development and supports; and
 - Design of organizational structures and leadership capacities to sustain and enact these elements strategically.



LEGISLATORS AND LITERACY: A CONVERSATION WITH KRISTEN AMUNDSON



Former Virginia Delegate Kristen Amundson left office in January 2010 after serving 10 years in the House of Delegates. During the 2009 session of the Virginia General Assembly she sponsored House Bill 2344, which would have required middle and high schools to set reading benchmarks for student achievement in grades six to 12 in English, history, social science, science and math by July 2010. One year later, the bill would have required each local school board to develop a comprehensive adolescent literacy policy and action plan to implement the benchmarks.

Even though the bill did not have a fiscal impact, it stalled in the House Education Committee. Amundson now works as communications manager for Education Sector, a Washington, D.C.-based education think tank. Before leaving office, Amundson shared her thoughts regarding the role of legislators in improving adolescent literacy.

"I think the first thing that state legislatures have to do is to 'get it,' and they don't," she said. Amundson contends many legislators believe because they have invested heavily in teaching literacy skills in early grades, it's not necessary to spend more to teach literacy skills beyond fourth grade. She considers that kind of thinking faulty. "And just like saying that a kid with fourth grade math skills is not done with math, we need to be looking at reading and literacy skills on a much longer-term basis. And that's the hurdle that I could not get over in Virginia," she said.

"It's not an accident that this country tends to read on grade level by grade four," she continued. "State legislatures had a lot to do with that. They invested a lot of money. They lowered class size. They increased teacher training. They did all kinds of things. And they got there, and now it's like, 'You want us to do more?'" Most legislators think they are done with funding school literacy at that point, according to Amundson.

Amundson said legislators on the House Education Committee were angry when she told them children couldn't read. "They just didn't want to hear it. Denial is a wonderful coping mechanism. And when you don't know what to do, denial works as well as anything. So, I think in the near term they were in denial. They didn't want to accept it."

However, Amundson said she believes shining the spotlight on adolescent literacy through the Carnegie Corporation's Time to Act report and other resources will eventually result in legislators taking action.

Amundson said she believes improving adolescent literacy can be done with minimal state investment. When content area benchmarks are set periodically, she contends it is important to incorporate literacy standards.

"Don't do this in isolation. Do it step-by-step, and do it as part of your regular content area review," she advised. "That's the first step." But it doesn't stop there. After that, Amundson said legislators need to:

- ▶ Identify reading skills discipline by discipline,
- ▶ Develop a process to assess reading skills,
- ▶ Figure out how to teach the reading skills, and
- ▶ Train teachers.

(Text of House Bill 2344 can be accessed at <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?091+ful+HB2344>.)

NAEP COMPARISONS - 2007 EIGHTH GRADE READING SCORES

STATE	NATIONAL RANK	ALL STUDENTS	MALE	FEMALE	WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	SCHOOL LUNCH ELIGIBLE	SCHOOL LUNCH NON-ELIGIBLE
Alabama	46	251.94	247.09	256.84	261.48	235.90	249.97	240.59	263.05
Alaska	37	258.80	253.39	264.40	270.00	250.47	257.18	244.39	267.63
Arizona	43	254.83	250.62	259.10	269.22	247.86	241.14	241.13	265.12
Arkansas	40	257.96	252.61	263.18	266.39	235.77	248.73	247.39	269.01
California	48	251.29	246.08	256.70	265.98	237.01	239.50	239.06	263.62
Colorado	17	266.41	261.54	271.40	274.56	252.39	249.41	251.31	273.47
Connecticut	14	267.06	262.42	271.53	275.93	246.13	242.64	243.44	275.4
Delaware	23	264.54	259.91	269.19	273.82	250.47	256.74	253.84	269.87
DC	51	240.79	235.21	245.25	*	237.92	249.06	234.27	252.77
Florida	33	259.79	253.86	266.13	267.91	243.77	255.85	249.15	267.61
Georgia	38	258.70	253.33	263.98	270.95	245.96	249.88	246.86	269.82
Hawaii	47	251.33	244.16	258.53	261.90	254.73	248.92	242.85	257.12
Idaho	22	264.89	260.41	269.56	268.11	*	243.20	255.93	269.85
Illinois	28	262.83	258.62	266.89	270.79	243.55	250.21	248.9	271.74
Indiana	25	264.10	258.56	269.64	268.03	242.29	255.24	250.71	271.37
Iowa	12	267.45	263.39	271.82	269.53	247.15	250.41	252.95	273.88
Kansas	13	267.41	262.71	272.33	272.37	245.70	248.13	253.37	275.39
Kentucky	30	261.97	257.43	266.20	264.10	246.84	*	252.20	270.90
Louisiana	44	253.24	248.38	258.11	263.80	240.47	*	245.12	264.93
Maine	5	269.92	263.95	275.95	270.35	*	*	260.67	274.32
Maryland	20	265.24	260.34	269.87	275.77	249.03	257.57	250.91	270.99
Massachusetts	1	273.28	268.58	278.29	278.02	253.07	250.61	255.94	279.45
Michigan	32	260.32	254.96	265.64	266.99	235.92	240.54	243.7	268.21
Minnesota	8	268.20	262.59	274.10	272.51	244.59	244.51	253.62	273.47
Mississippi	50	250.06	245.55	254.90	263.58	238.41	*	242.01	265.76
Missouri	27	263.44	258.99	267.97	269.84	241.97	247.75	251.54	271.25
Montana	3	270.94	264.94	277.56	274.10	*	*	259.85	276.67
Nebraska	15	267.03	262.01	272.07	270.85	242.86	254.82	253.57	273.33
Nevada	45	252.35	245.04	259.34	262.72	247.58	238.48	240.24	260.03
New Hampshire	6	269.73	264.02	275.48	270.07	*	251.66	257.17	272.19
New Jersey	4	270.14	266.01	274.37	278.33	249.13	256.53	250.86	277.14
New Mexico	49	250.75	247.30	254.50	265.21	248.25	245.54	241.99	264.09
New York	26	263.55	258.07	269.02	274.40	245.57	245.81	250.42	275.45
North Carolina	36	259.14	253.86	264.81	270.33	240.93	245.90	245.53	270.41
North Dakota	9	268.02	264.19	272.00	269.93	*	*	257.78	271.71
Ohio	10	267.98	263.82	272.09	273.61	246.35	259.65	251.28	275.44
Oklahoma	34	259.55	255.30	264.12	265.69	243.38	241.12	251.51	267.68
Oregon	19	265.71	260.20	271.16	269.91	249.73	243.50	253.18	273.93
Pennsylvania	11	267.67	264.82	270.46	272.49	247.70	244.39	252.53	274.58
Rhode Island	39	258.32	255.51	261.08	267.31	238.75	233.36	241.58	266.68
South Carolina	41	257.42	252.85	261.96	268.10	241.76	243.68	244.56	269.13
South Dakota	7	269.60	265.60	273.53	272.22	*	*	259.03	274.29
Tennessee	35	259.16	253.70	264.44	266.79	239.79	251.96	247.31	268.79
Texas	31	260.81	255.98	265.53	274.84	248.65	250.91	249.35	273.20
Utah	29	262.23	257.99	266.71	266.04	*	241.89	251.79	266.85
Vermont	2	273.05	267.60	278.22	272.86	*	*	260.34	277.58
Virginia	16	266.88	261.69	271.96	272.59	252.22	258.42	252.47	271.99
Washington	21	264.95	259.50	270.16	269.96	247.00	246.92	250.63	272.10
West Virginia	42	255.00	247.98	262.33	255.60	240.74	*	245.87	262.75
Wisconsin	24	264.18	256.80	271.63	269.51	231.33	247.44	245.82	271.79
Wyoming	18	266.23	261.22	271.28	268.90	*	248.26	255.42	270.21
U.S. Average		261.01	256.01	266.07	270.28	243.83	245.77	247.19	270.72

(*) Reporting Standards not met

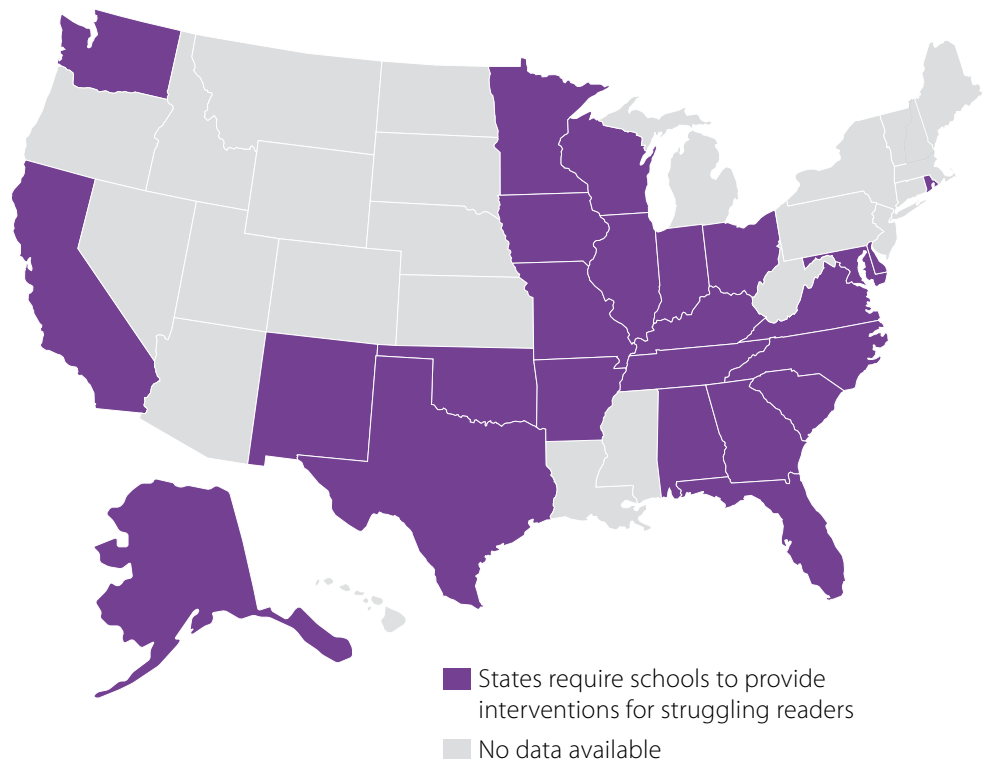
Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

Steps States Are Already Taking

Legislatures in several states have responded to the adolescent literacy crisis in recent years by adopting various measures. Some examples of legislation enacted in 2009 include:

- ▶ Kentucky Senate Bill 1 (<http://www.lrc.ky.gov/record/09rs/SB1.htm>) expands and strengthens existing professional development requirements pertaining to literacy. The bill, signed into law in March, replaces a provision that teacher professional development may address phonics with a provision that teacher professional development must include instruction in reading, including phonics, phonemic awareness, comprehension, fluency and vocabulary.
- ▶ Texas House Bill 4328 (<http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/81R/billtext/pdf/HB04328F.pdf>) established the Interagency Literacy Council in order to study, promote and enhance literacy in the state. The bill, signed into law in June, specifies one of the duties of the council is to study current research to assess the adult literacy needs in the state. It also directs the council to develop a comprehensive state-wide action plan for the improvement of literacy, including a recommended timeline for implementation.
- ▶ Minnesota House File 2 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bin/showPDF.php>), signed into law in May, includes an assessment of reading instruction for teacher licensure of prekindergar-

States Require Schools To Provide Interventions For Struggling Readers



Source: Education Commission of the States

ten and elementary school candidates as part of the Board of Teaching's licensure exams.

- ▶ Washington Senate Bill 6016 (<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/documents/billdocs/2009-10/Pdf/Bills/Senate%20Passed%20Legislature/6016-S.PL.pdf>), signed into law in April, requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop an educator training program to enhance the reading, writing and spelling skills of students with dyslexia by implementing the findings of the dyslexia pilot program and to develop a dyslexia handbook to be used as reference for teachers and parents of students. It also requires each educational service district to report to the office the number of individuals who participate in the training.

Innovative State Programs

Just Read, Florida making huge gains

It would probably be a stretch to call Florida's landmark adolescent literacy program a rags-to-riches success story. After all, the state still ranks below the national average in eighth grade national reading scores. But Barbara Elzie, the interim executive director of Just Read, Florida, recalls when Florida was at the bottom of national rankings less than 10 years ago. That was before the enactment of Just Read, Florida, which was created in 2001 by executive order 01-260.

"At that time, we were at the bottom of NAEP. We were not competitive. We were one of the lowest states. So in a short period of time we have been able to turn it around," Elzie points out.

The results have been impressive by any standard. Florida was one of only six states that made significant improvements between 1998 and 2007 in the percentage of students scoring proficient or above on National Assessment of Educational Progress standards. It also was one of just six states that demonstrated improvement between 2005 and 2007 and the only state in the country to show improvement in both comparisons, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Florida legislators took further action in 2006, enacting House Bill 7087, commonly referred to as A++. (The text to HB 7087 can be accessed at http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Documents/loadoc.aspx?FileName=_h7087er.doc&DocumentType=Bill&BillNumber=7087&Session=2006.) A provision of the law requires high school stu-

dents who score at Level 1, or the lowest level of the state's reading assessment, to complete an intensive reading course the following year. It also provides placement of Level 2 readers in either an intensive reading course or a content area course in which reading strategies are delivered.

Some of the key components of Just Read, Florida include:

- ▶ Training highly effective reading coaches;
- ▶ Using scientifically-based reading research to define effective reading instruction;
- ▶ Encouraging all teachers to integrate reading instruction into their content areas;
- ▶ Providing technical assistance to school districts in the development and implementation of district literacy plans;
- ▶ Periodically reviewing state curriculum standards for reading at all grade levels; and
- ▶ Reviewing teacher certification examinations to determine whether the examinations measure the skills needed for research-based reading instruction and instructional strategies for teaching reading in the content areas.

Perhaps most important to ensure a long-term commitment to academic literacy, in 2006 the legislature passed a bill, signed into law by then-Gov. Jeb Bush, that designated a permanent budget allocation in the state education finance program. That allocation that ensures that reading education is a permanent part of the annual state funding formula.

According to Elzie, the highest allocation has been \$116 million. Despite financial challenges in the state budget, the program still receives \$100 million, according to Elzie.

Laurie Lee, the state's middle school reading specialist, insists it's an investment that's important for the state to make. "We're either going to invest in our students now or we're going to pay for them later," Lee said. "Because many of them will end up in institutions, and if they can't read they can't function well in society and we're going to be paying a lot for them later."

Most recently, Just Read, Florida implemented an electronic data tracking system called Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading. It is a diagnostic tool to provide tracking for students receiving literacy intervention. So far, 1.7 million

students have been assessed in Florida, and will continue to be tested three times per year.

“This helps teachers to really target their instruction so they know, is it a comprehension problem, is it a fluency problem (or) is it a problem with word level skills?” Lee explained. “Because in middle and high school, we can’t afford to waste time teaching kids stuff they already know. We have to be sure that we’re addressing our education needs, and this assessment does a wonderful job of doing that.”

Florida’s reading assessment was developed exclusively for the state. It is proprietary for the state, having been designed by the state Department of Education and programmed by an outside vendor.

More information about Just Read, Florida is available at www.justreadflorida.com.

Massachusetts to revise literacy standards

Massachusetts eighth-graders have led the nation in reading scores for at least three consecutive years, despite the fact that significant achievement gaps exist in the state among races and socioeconomic groups. In an effort to bolster adolescent literacy efforts in the state, the Massachusetts Department of Education received a grant from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices in 2006 to develop a state literacy plan. Through Carnegie Corporation funding, NGA also provided funds and technical assistance for similar efforts in Alabama, Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, New Jersey and North Carolina.

Massachusetts used the funding to convene an adolescent literacy task force to recommend a five-year strategic plan to improve adolescent literacy by 2012. The task force included members from the governor’s office, representatives from elemen-



tary, secondary and higher education, legislators, business and philanthropy. The Literacy Task Force released five broad recommendations in its report to the State Board of Education in December 2006. (The report is available at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/literacy/nga/tfreport.pdf>). Foremost among the recommendations is the priority to review and revise all standards on a regular basis. The state is currently revising its English Language Arts standards. Among the key revisions are:

- ▶ Articulating beginning reading skills across all dimensions of reading through fourth grade;
- ▶ Establishing a progression of vocabulary development skills including the use of morphology to determine word meaning of multisyllabic words during the upper elementary, middle and high school years;
- ▶ Integrating vocabulary and comprehension skills and genre study with increased attention to the reading and writing of informational and persuasive text in elementary, middle and high school; and
- ▶ Increased attention to conducting research that requires the use of technology for accessing and evaluating the veracity of information along with reading, writing and presentation skills.

Cheryl Liebling, director of the Massachusetts Office of Literacy, notes that “learning to read involves not only word-level decoding, but also comprehension of increasingly complex text,” she said. “Building background knowledge and vocabulary development is central to comprehension at all grade levels. These skills continue to develop throughout elementary and middle school as students encounter increasingly unfamiliar content-driven text.” Despite the efforts of some to label beginning reading as a stage of “learning to read” only, Liebling argues that even young children read to learn. Furthermore, older students not only read to learn, but also must learn to read more sophisticated and unfamiliar, complex text if they are to be ready for college and careers.”

Liebling explains that Massachusetts is revising its 2001 English Language Arts standards with particular attention to the demands of reading and writing nonfiction informational and persuasive text in addition to narrative and fiction.

“We hope to encourage teachers at all grade levels to maximize the use of reading and writing skills as part of content-area instruction,” Liebling said.

“Achieving consensus on the next generation of English Language Arts standards is critical to the achievement of future goals for a comprehensive assessment system, the implementation of research-based instructional practices in every classroom, and review of licensure requirements with respect to literacy coursework and experience for classroom teachers and literacy specialists and coaches.”

New Jersey LEADS literacy efforts

In 2005, the New Jersey Department of Education initiated an adolescent literacy pilot training program known as Literacy is Essential to Adolescent Development and Success, nicknamed LEADS. Starting with three participating school districts during its initial year, the program later expanded to 18 districts and one charter school.

Mary Jane Kurabinski, the director of language arts literacy education at the New Jersey Department of Education, calls LEADS a framework not a program.

“We do not recommend any curriculum or any particular materials. LEADS is not packaged in that you have to follow a script. It is a framework in that we help teachers to structure the language arts literacy block but also to work with other content area teachers,” she explained. “It is a way of teaching as opposed to using certain materials.”

In each of the LEADS school districts, Kurabinski’s team provides professional development for six full days with technical assistance and additional professional development and coaching to teachers throughout each school year.

LEADS is intended to accomplish the following goals:

- ▶ Ensure that all students do not merely aim to be at a basic literacy level, but are challenged to do proficient and advanced work;
- ▶ Ensure that instruction is geared at the proficient and advanced proficient levels and engages all students in their learning;
- ▶ Provide a structured, student-centered approach with scientifically-based reading research strategies, techniques and interventions;
- ▶ Train a cadre of teachers who will return to their classes as agents of change; and
- ▶ Create a series of professional development opportunities that can serve as a model for the training of middle grades teachers.

Kurabinski said results from the school districts

that have been part of the LEADS initiative the longest indicate an improvement in reading test scores. She also said school districts have shifted their philosophy and practice pertaining to teaching literacy in middle school grades.

“Districts have really embraced this and shifted how they think about middle grades,” she said, “Districts have put more money into buying more books at instructional level for students. So instead of students coming into eighth grade and having eighth-grade books, with some students unable to read eighth-grade books, there are now wide ranges of reading levels available to all students. And teachers have been trained to take kids from where they are to where they need to be.”

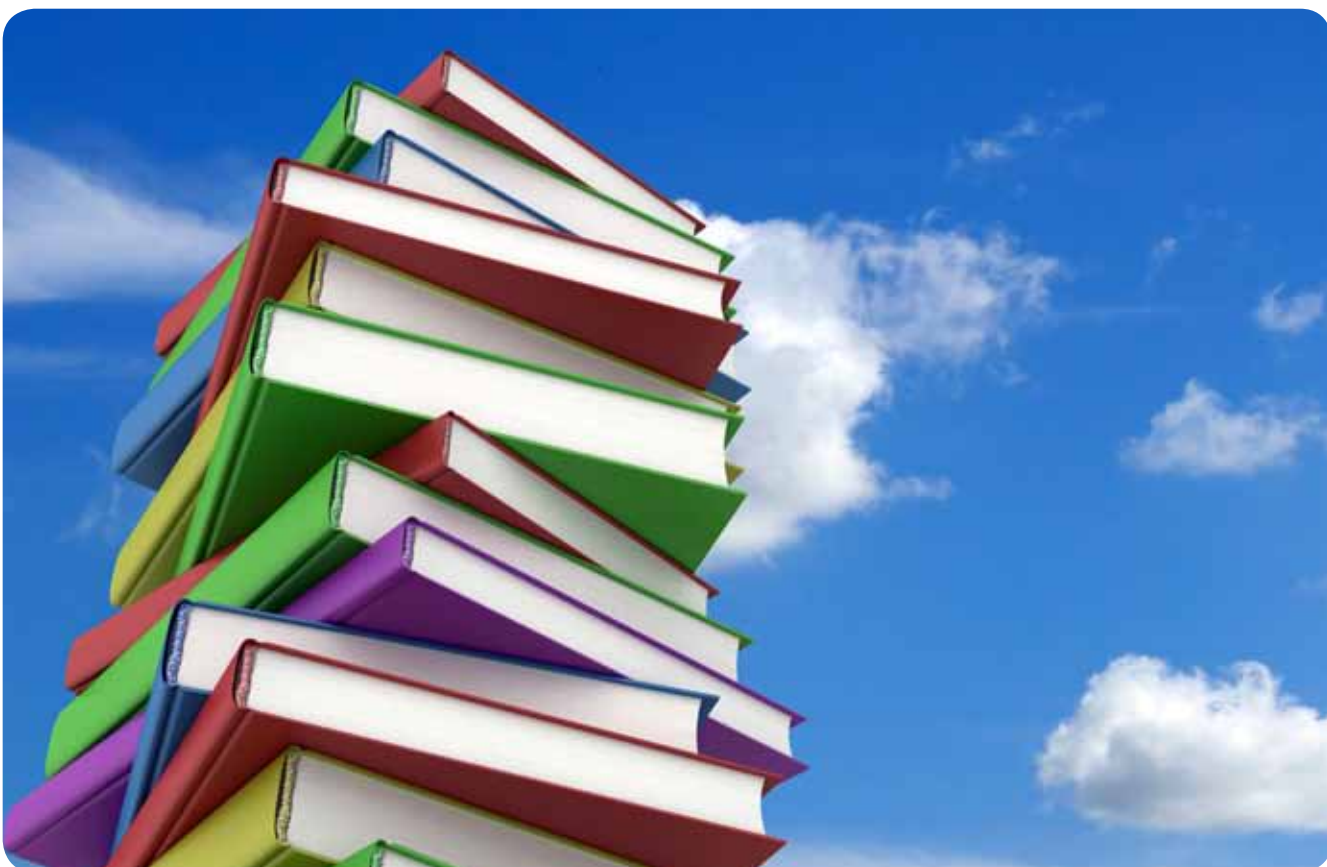
The state does not directly fund LEADS. Districts must pay the costs associated with the training and implementation from Title One funds or other district funds.

Conclusion

Although reading instruction has been, and will in all likelihood continue to be, a matter left largely to schools and local school districts, the role of state policymakers is evolving in this area. An increasing number of states have expanded

their roles in adolescent literacy, attempting to provide local districts with heightened levels of support and technical assistance to improve literacy skills among middle and high school students. Policymakers recognize students must improve their literacy skills to be better prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce, and this belief clearly is supported by data. Reports, such as the Carnegie Corporation’s Time to Act, point to a need for state-level actions. Additionally, recent legislative activities demonstrate in many states, legislators understand that they, too, have a role to play in ensuring students graduate from high school with literacy skills needed for college or a career.

Building capacity to ensure literacy skills are taught in all grades and subject areas will require systemic changes that must come from state and federal levels in order to be implemented in individual schools. The case, however, is clear: Schools can no longer focus reading efforts entirely on the early grades. In short, when it comes to literacy skills, the early years of elementary education can no longer be viewed as the end, but rather as a foundation upon which teachers must continue to build the reading skills required for academic success.





Sharing capitol ideas.

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