WISCONSIN

Read to Lead

Task Force Recommendations

January 2012

Read to Lead

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Dear Fellow Wisconsinites,

There is no skill more important to future success than reading. The literacy skills a child acquires in the early years of life provide the foundation for all later learning. Wisconsin has many dedicated parents, educators, and community members who work tirelessly to support our children in acquiring this fundamental skill. Yet, far too many Wisconsin children enter school lacking basic early literacy skills, far too many read below grade level, and achievement gaps are far too large. The record is clear that students in most states have been increasing their achievement in reading faster than students in Wisconsin on national measures. We must make Wisconsin a national leader again in reading.

To address this issue so critical to the future of our children and our state, we formed the Read to Lead Task Force in March 2011. Comprised of an impressive array of educators, reading experts, elected officials from both parties, and philanthropic and non-profit representatives, the Read to Lead Task Force was charged with reviewing the state of reading in Wisconsin and developing a plan for improvement. This report summarizes the Task Force's findings and recommendations.

As a result of the Task Force's work, we are advancing an aggressive action plan to improve reading outcomes in Wisconsin, including:

- Early literacy screening for all four and five year old kindergartners;
- Improvements to teacher preparation programs around early reading, including a new, more rigorous, reading exam for reading educators;
- Aggressive professional development opportunities to enhance the skills of current reading educators, including a new online professional development portal and an annual reading conference; and
- Creation of a public-private partnership to engage Wisconsin philanthropies and businesses around the goal of ensuring every child can read by the end of 3rd grade.

To hold our institutions accountable for improving reading results, Wisconsin's new educator effectiveness system will require a portion of every educator's evaluation to be based on growth in school-wide reading scores, and our new school and district accountability system will give extra weight to how students are performing on the state's 3rd grade reading assessment. In addition, districts underperforming in reading will be required to implement targeted improvements, including a science-based reading program.

We are grateful for the work of the Read to Lead Task Force and believe that their recommendations will dramatically improve reading outcomes in Wisconsin. While these changes will be significant, our work does not end here. To dramatically improve reading performance in our state, every Wisconsin citizen must be part of the solution. There are many ways to support a child who is learning to read, and together, our collective efforts can make the difference in the lives of our children and in the future success of our state.

We look forward to working together with you, the people of Wisconsin, to advance these recommendations, and reaching our goal of ensuring every child can read.

Sincerely,

Scott Walker
Governor
Chair, Read to Lead Task Force

Tony Evers
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Vice Chair, Read to Lead Task Force

INTRODUCTION

It is often said that by the start of 4th grade, a child is no longer learning to read but instead reading to learn.

No skill is as fundamental to student achievement as the ability to read.

The ongoing process of learning to read can present significant challenges to a child. However, as a child learns to read, the process is life changing and opens up new worlds of opportunity.

An April 2011 study by Donald J. Hernandez at the City University of New York demonstrated the importance of reading skills on later academic achievement. Hernandez showed that students reading below a proficient level are four times more likely than proficient readers to not graduate on time. This number increases to thirteen times more likely if a child is living in poverty.[i]

A large body of research has shown the price we all pay when students drop out of school. A high school dropout earns hundreds of thousands of dollars less over the course of his or her life than a graduate[ii] and represents significant costs to society in the form of increased spending on social welfare programs,[iii] lowered economic output,[iv] and higher crime rates.[v]

There is no doubt that while low reading achievement can lead to poverty later in life, poverty also tends to be a barrier to literacy. Our goal is to acknowledge the barriers presented to the children of Wisconsin and do everything possible to help them overcome these challenges while keeping in mind that all students can and deserve to learn how to read.

Read To Lead- Task Force Recommendations

INTRODUCTION

For years, Wisconsin ranked among the states with the highest reading scores. However, over the past fifteen years, our state's performance relative to the nation's has been especially troubling.

The results from the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 4th grade reading assessment show that while Wisconsin was once ranked among the very top states in the nation, we now rank somewhere in the middle of the pack. Specifically, Wisconsin ranked statistically below only Maine in 1994 with a scale score statistically higher than the national average.[vi] In 2011, Wisconsin ranks statistically below 15 states or jurisdictions. Most striking is that Wisconsin's growth, or lack thereof, between 1994 and 2011 is statistically lower than that of 35 states or jurisdictions and above none.[vii]

The picture is also quite troubling in Milwaukee where both higher and lower income students rank below the same subgroups in the average large urban district by a statistically significant margin.[viii]

Many in our state may not realize how far we have fallen relative to the nation as a whole because our standards have been set so low. In response to the need to improve state standards and create a common set of expectations for children across the country, Wisconsin was among the first of 48 states and territories to adopt the Common Core State Standards, a set of rigorous new standards that are benchmarked against the standards of high performing countries. These standards create a common set of expectations for children across the country. As Wisconsin implements and assesses student performance against the more rigorous new standards, parents, students, and educators must be prepared for this demanding change.

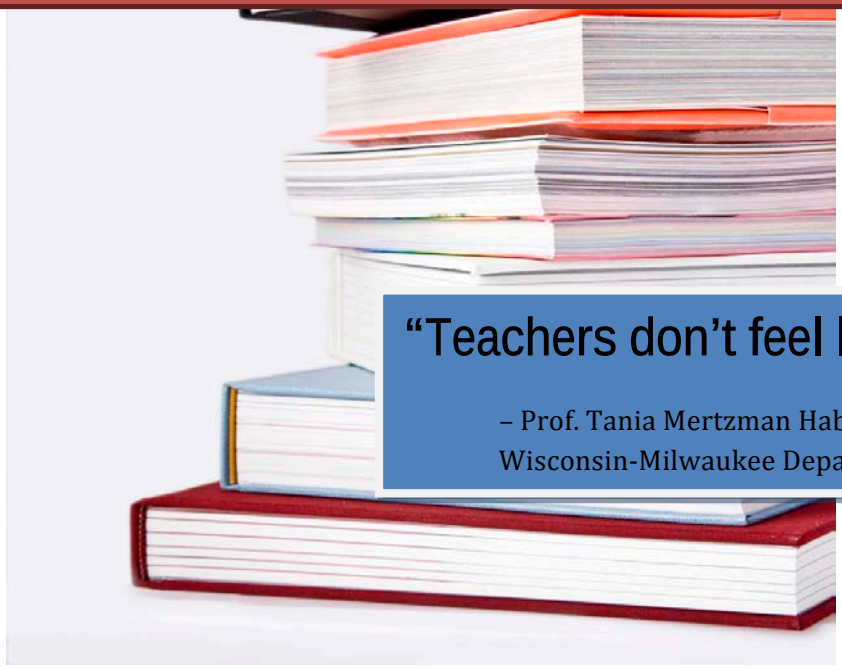
Although NAEP scores point to declining reading performance, Wisconsin does better than most in ensuring high school completion. In fact, the Badger State led the nation in the 2008-09 school year with a graduation rate of 90.7%.[ix] Additionally, districts have found ways to achieve a high success rate. We must further examine and seek out what these districts are doing and replicate the teaching practices that will ensure that all of Wisconsin students will succeed.

Still, for many, a high school diploma may not be enough. We must ensure our high school graduates are college or career ready without the need for additional remediation.

While raising the bar and replicating best practices will certainly serve Wisconsin's students well, we cannot expect them to improve with higher standards alone. To improve literacy in Wisconsin, we must do more. Wisconsin needs families to stress the importance of reading to their children long before they enter a classroom and teachers who are given more effective literacy instruction during both pre-service and in-service training. We need to provide greater access to proven intervention strategies when students are struggling. We must try to counteract social conditions like poverty that hinder learning. We must hold every adult in a child's life responsible for the task of ensuring that each child can read by the end of 3rd grade.

This report is a summation of the findings and recommendations of Governor Scott Walker's READ TO LEAD Task Force. This bipartisan group of reading teachers, elected officials, researchers, and advocates has shared its insights and expertise in an effort to improve reading outcomes in the State of Wisconsin.

TEACHER PREPARATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



> "Teachers don't feel like experts in reading."
>
> – Prof. Tania Mertzman Habeck, Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Department of Curriculum and Instruction

High reading achievement starts with great teachers who have the proper tools and support to be effective.

We must recruit bright, motivated future teachers into quality teaching programs that provide sufficient instruction on how to teach reading along with quality student teaching experiences. Once new teachers find themselves in classrooms of their own, they need high-quality and targeted professional development as well as useful feedback from their peers and supervisors. Aspiring educators must acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively teach reading to all students who walk through the classroom door.

Read to Lead– Task Force Recommendations

TEACHER PREPAREDNESS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Task Force makes several assumptions in this area:

COMPREHENSION is the ultimate goal of reading instruction.

Reading comprehension struggles are often tied to problems in PHONOLOGICAL PROCESSING, LETTER SOUND KNOWLEDGE, FLUENCY, and/or lack of BACKGROUND EXPERIENCE and VOCABULARY, or a combination of these.

Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension need to be TAUGHT and ASSESSED systematically and explicitly.

There are 33 institutions of higher education in Wisconsin that educate future teachers.[x] Although the Task Force did not study each institution's program individually, the Task Force heard through testimony that these preparation programs vary considerably in the amount and the rigor of reading preparation that they provide to aspiring educators. Preparation programs have reduced instruction in reading in recent years and many require prospective elementary school teachers to take, few if any, courses in reading. While the state does currently set minimum content standards for educator preparation programs, the Task Force believes these standards need to be strengthened to ensure all new teachers are fully equipped to meet the needs of their students.

With respect to coursework, the Task Force heard testimony which suggested content knowledge in reading instruction needs to be strengthened. Before 2000, an individual seeking licensure in early childhood education, elementary level education, or elementary/middle level education was required to complete 6-12 credits in reading instruction. Since Wisconsin's teacher licensing laws were revised in 2000, the state significantly scaled back teacher preparation requirements in reading instruction.[xi] More limited reading requirements are now in place for three licenses: Early Childhood (Birth-Age 8), Early Childhood/Middle Childhood (Birth- Age 11), and Middle Childhood/Early Adolescence (Age 6 – Age 12/13).

Currently, to meet "highly qualified teacher" requirements under federal law,[xii] Wisconsin uses the Praxis II Elementary Content Knowledge exam for the Early Childhood and Early Childhood/Middle Childhood licenses, and the Praxis II Middle Level Content Exam for the Middle Childhood/Early Adolescence licenses. These exams cover broad content areas, but do not offer extensive assessment of educators' knowledge of reading instruction, particularly in comparison to the reading-specific exams required by some other states such as Massachusetts, Virginia, and Connecticut.

Once a teacher has achieved licensure, requirements for ongoing professional development currently are vested at the individual school and district level. To renew a teaching license, six credits of continuing education or a Professional Development Plan (PDP) are required, but the individual educator maintains discretion over how he or she chooses to meet these requirements. It is likely more could be done in this area to ensure PDPs are more relevant to the literacy needs of our students.

At the school and district level, federal Title I and Title II programs provide both additional requirements and funding for professional development. Districts may use reading specialists, reading coaches, or both to advance professional development among teachers, but the Task Force found that the implementation and effectiveness of these approaches vary by district and/or school.

There is no consistent statewide practice for how Wisconsin's reading practitioners are best utilized, meaning that reading specialists, reading teachers, and reading coaches are often used in different and, at times, unintended ways.

Reading specialists and reading coaches are intended to work with teachers to improve their instructional practice; reading teachers work with students. When resources are limited, whether by finances, geography, or the labor market, these roles are sometimes intermingled.

Read to Lead –Task Force Recommendations

TEACHER PREPAREDNESS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the area of teacher preparation, the Read to Lead Task Force makes the following recommendations:

- All teachers and administrators, especially those who frequently interact with new readers, should receive more instruction in reading pedagogy. If needed, reading should be prioritized over other non-content area topics currently in the teacher preparation curriculum. However, this increased time spent on reading must come in the form of more evidence-based and results-oriented strategies, knowledge and skills, not simply more credits. Programs should, at a minimum, focus on the evidence-based practices and the five components of reading as defined by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These issues must be addressed through greater accountability at the state level and a commitment to tackling this problem by the institutions of higher education that prepare our teachers.

- The current Wisconsin teacher licensure exam has few questions on reading instruction, and many of those questions are lacking in rigor. Reading should be emphasized specifically; however, the state should also take this opportunity to strengthen licensure requirements overall. Specifically, the Task Force recommends the well-regarded Massachusetts Test for Education Licensure (MTEL) "Foundations of Reading" to be the required state exam by 2013 to raise the bar. The exam should be incorporated within the current Wisconsin exam to reduce costs in the short term. In the long term, the state should explore adopting MTEL exams across all subject areas.

- As part of the process of adopting a new exam, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) will inform institutions of higher education on what will be covered on the MTEL, thereby igniting a much-needed conversation to ensure the theoretical and technical knowledge needed to teach students to read is effectively and sufficiently taught to prospective reading teachers.

- Teacher preparation programs should expand and strengthen partnerships with local school districts and early childhood programs so aspiring teachers can receive classroom and mentoring experiences in diverse locations earlier and more frequently. Specifically, Cardinal Stritch's Southeastern Wisconsin New Teacher Project has shown promise.

- The performance of graduates should be used to evaluate and improve teacher preparation programs. This performance information should be easily accessible to the public.

- Reading professionals must work with both students and teachers to ensure each student receives consistent and appropriately targeted instruction and interventions. In order to ensure best practices are implemented at the school level, a professional development conference should be convened for Wisconsin's reading specialists and elementary school principals.

Read to Lead –Task Force Recommendations

TEACHER PREPAREDNESS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is essential for all teachers to help them strengthen and improve their skills and knowledge. Professional development should be high quality, relevant, and targeted.

In the area of professional development, the Task Force makes the following recommendations:

- As reforms are made in our teacher preparation programs, a significant investment should also be made at the state level to enhance the level of skills and knowledge of practicing educators.
- To expand access and reduce costs, DPI should make high quality, science-based online professional development available to all teachers through an easy-to-use portal.
- DPI should change the rule in PI-34 to ensure that professional development plans for all initial educators include a component that focuses on development of reading and writing instructional strategies appropriate for the level of license and content taught.
- DPI should also, through PI-34, require professional development in reading instruction for teachers with students who continually show low levels of achievement and/or growth in reading.

SCREENING, ASSESSMENT & INTERVENTION

"We must provide teachers with the ability to interpret tests, rather than just give them."

– Prof. Marcia Henry, Professor Emeritus, San Jose State University; Past President, International Dyslexia Association

To achieve better results, some students need early, targeted, and timely reading interventions to help them reach their full potential. Interventions are a way to address issues early and ultimately reduce the number of older students who cannot read. The vast majority of those referred for costly special education services are students who struggle in reading. Many of these difficulties could be overcome through early interventions, resulting in significant cost savings.[xiii]

To achieve the goals of early intervention and improved outcomes for all children, Wisconsin has developed a specific model for Response to Intervention (RtI). Schools and districts implementing a system of RtI:

1. Provide universal early screening beginning in kindergarten, ongoing assessment to monitor progress, and additional instructional interventions if needed.
2. Provide students considered to be at risk with interventions designed to meet their academic needs.
3. Actively monitor the progress of students receiving interventions to determine whether the changes are positively impacting their academic performance.

The state is focusing on reading as part of RtI, including specific guidance and extensive training in areas like core instructional practices and universal screening. For more specific information, DPI and Wisconsin's RtI Center direct educators to the National Center on Response to Intervention as one resource for comprehensive, scientific research-based information on effective literacy assessments, curriculum, and interventions. The What Works Clearinghouse, an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, is another resource.

Since the first statewide reading exam administered to Wisconsin students does not occur until the 3rd grade, many stakeholders inside and outside of the Read to Lead Task Force have also begun exploring the need for consistent, early screening and ongoing formal assessment in early literacy skills.

In addition to the Task Force, the Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council has recommended the creation of a comprehensive screening and assessment system "to identify children's individual development needs and to facilitate referrals to appropriate services."[xiv]

To that end, the Task Force has discussed and the state has begun exploring various options for early screening and ongoing literacy assessments. The Task Force believes that these assessments should be designed to identify students in need of additional reading instruction.

Moreover, Wisconsin could consider supplementing high quality reading instruction with additional supports for struggling readers. An example of such supports is the Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC), a statewide initiative to help every Minnesota child become a successful reader by the end of 3rd grade. As part of the program, MRC members work with preschoolers and focus on integrating talking, reading, and writing into all classroom activities to provide supplemental tutoring for children in kindergarten to 3rd grade.[xv]

Many changes are already being made to interventions, especially with regard to RtI; however, much more work is needed.

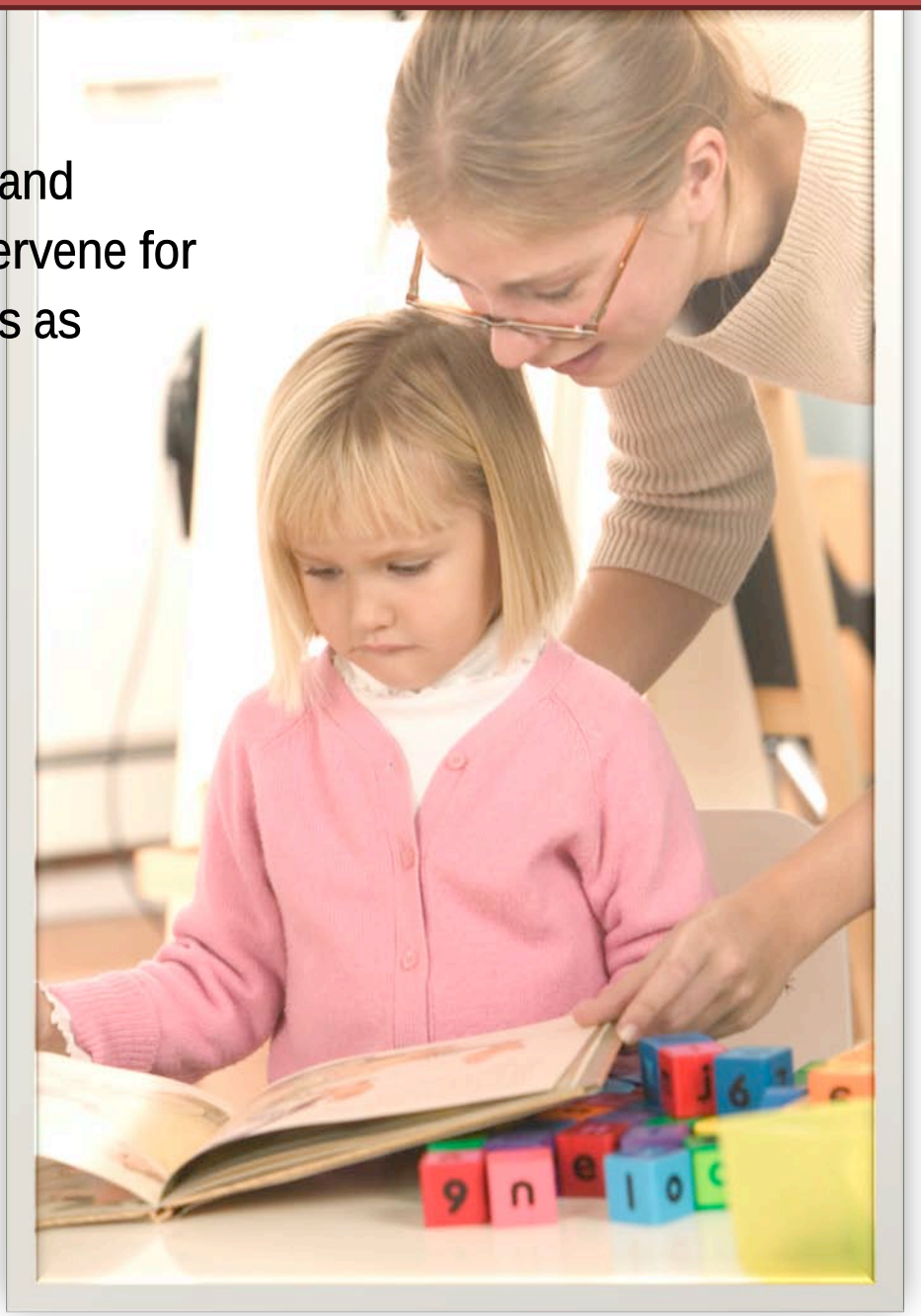
Read to Lead –Task Force Recommendations

SCREENING, ASSESSMENT & INTERVENTION

In the area of screening, assessment, and interventions, the Read to Lead Task Force makes the following recommendations:

- Wisconsin should implement a universal statewide screener in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade. The screener should be given to all students no later than the first month of kindergarten to ensure struggling readers can be identified as soon as possible. Students who show consistently high performance on these screeners may be exempted from future tests while those who continue to struggle should be screened more frequently. If a lack of financial resources necessitates a phase-in of these assessments, the state should prioritize the kindergarten assessment, followed by the pre-kindergarten assessment, before adding additional grades.
- As is the case in the older grades, the state must ensure that proper accommodations are given to students who are learning English as a second language or have special education needs.
- Districts must ensure that formal assessments complement and do not replace informal assessments. Assessments in elementary schools should be both formative and summative.
- Teachers, principals, and reading specialists should be given the tools to interpret and use these assessments to help guide their instruction.
- The state should ensure student-level data is shared within and across systems, including early childhood programs, K-12 schools, teachers, parents, reading specialists, and administrators.
- The Serve Wisconsin Board, which helps certify Americorps programs, should explore the creation of a program similar to the Minnesota Reading Corps in 2013.

EARLY CHILDHOOD



"The most efficient and effective time to intervene for struggling readers is as early as possible."

- Rachel Lander, Researcher, Value Added Research Center

A key to ensuring high achievement in reading, especially with low-income children, is to start early. Wisconsin has long been a leader in ensuring access to early childhood programs. While large numbers of Wisconsin children participate in childcare, Head Start, or four-year-old kindergarten (4K) programs, there are questions in some cases about the extent to which these programs are teaching children the skills, knowledge, and strategies that best prepare them to become proficient readers. Many offer quality academic curriculum that serve as a foundation for elementary school; some do not. Although the Read to Lead Task Force can offer recommendations in this area, changes are already underway to improve early childhood education in Wisconsin.

Read to Lead –Task Force Recommendations

EARLY CHILDHOOD

To improve the quality of childcare for Wisconsin children, the state created a child care quality rating and improvement system, known as YoungStar. Developed over the past two years and now in its first year of implementation, YoungStar helps parents choose the best care for their children, provides support and training to providers to help them deliver high-quality care, and sets a consistent standard across the state for child care quality. The state will soon begin linking child care subsidy payments to the "star" rating of the centers, providing an additional financial incentive for high quality programs.

In addition, nearly 85% of Wisconsin school districts now offer universal 4K programs, often in collaboration with local child care and Head Start centers.[xvi] As one of a handful of states to support 4K through our primary school equalization aid formula, Wisconsin has also provided school districts with consistent funding for this early learning program.

The governor's office, DPI, and Department of Children and Families (DCF) also partnered to advance an application for the federal Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant. This collaboration allowed the state to further define its priorities and next steps for improving early childhood education, including in early literacy.

Although Wisconsin's application fell just short of receiving federal funding, the state remains dedicated to implementing critical upgrades to our early childhood education system. These upgrades include the screening and assessments previously noted, as well as the development of longitudinal data systems that begin in early childhood and follow children as they enter kindergarten.

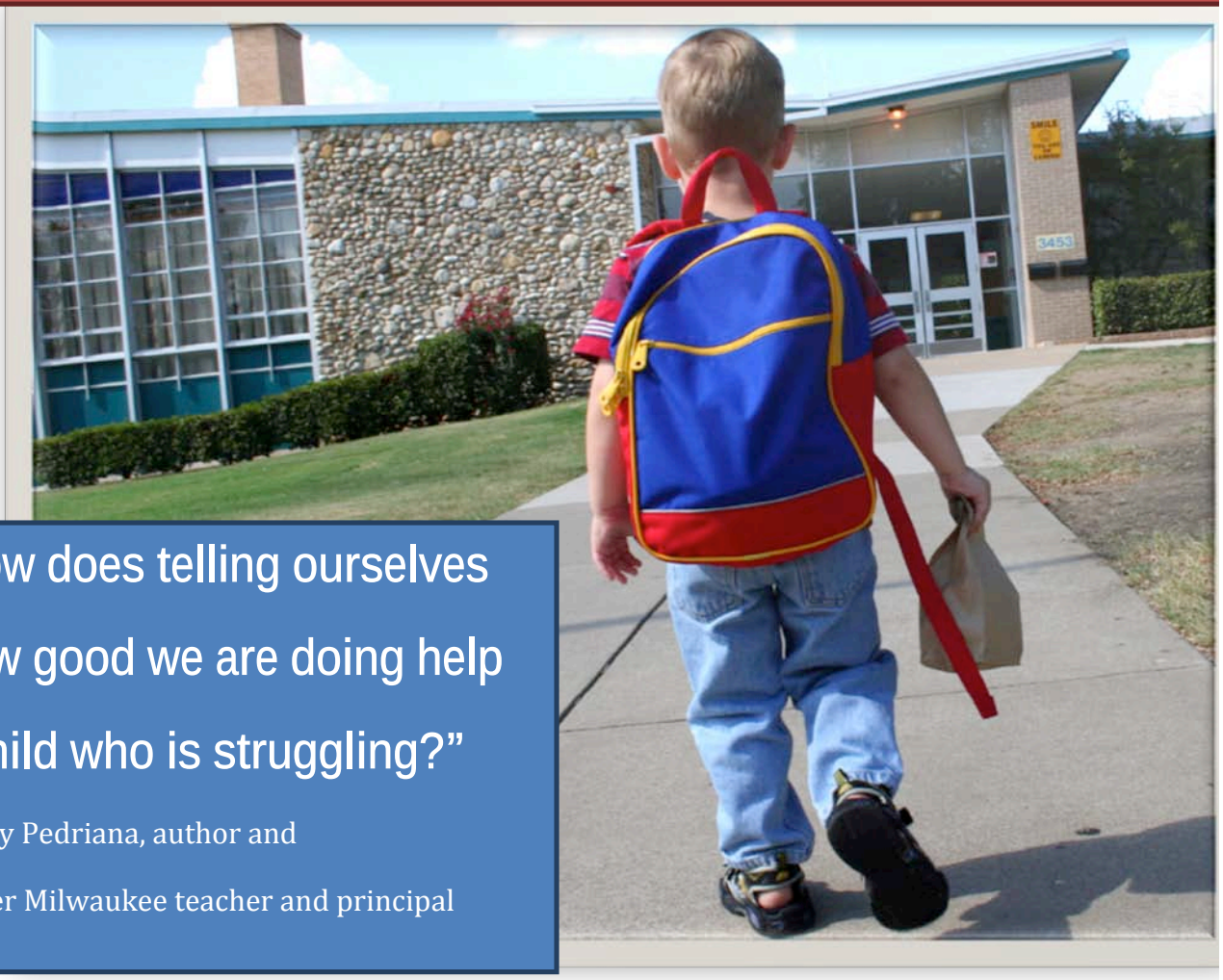
Read to Lead –Task Force Recommendations

EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Read to Lead Task Force makes the following early childhood recommendations:

- DPI should continue to work with DCF to link K-12 and early childhood program data. This linkage will allow for long-term evaluation of early childhood practices and their effectiveness.
- The state should explore a way to ensure that all 4K programs have a sufficient literacy component.
- DPI has agreed to review and update the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards to ensure accuracy of its definitions as well as alignment with the Common Core State Standards. Greater focus must now be placed on ensuring fidelity of implementation.
- DCF should strengthen YoungStar to include more specific early literacy criteria to the rating system.

ACCOUNTABILITY



"How does telling ourselves how good we are doing help a child who is struggling?"

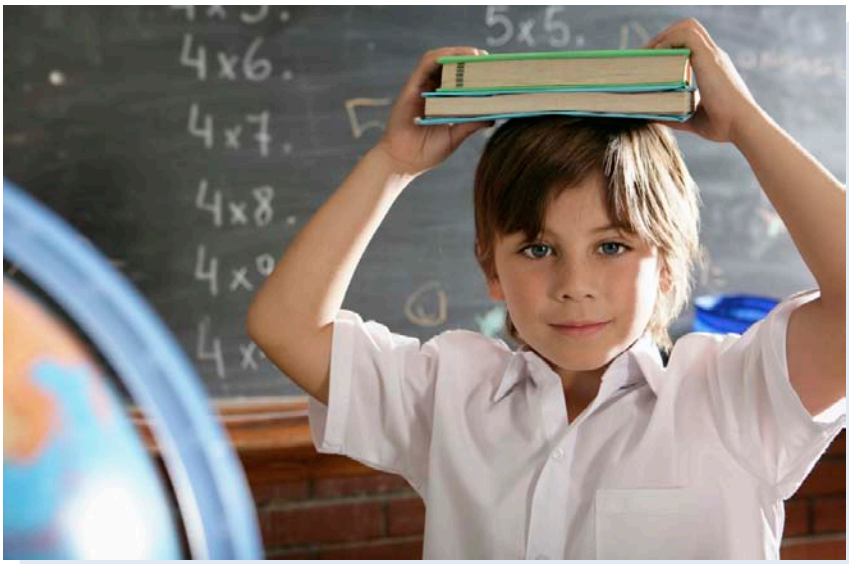
– Tony Pedriana, author and former Milwaukee teacher and principal

The Task Force believes that, if implemented properly, the recommendations set forth in this report will make a considerable difference for students learning to read in Wisconsin.

However, the Task Force has also considered what might happen if there continue to be areas in need of improvement. Today there are few, if any, direct ramifications if children move through the educational system without learning to read.

Read to Lead –Task Force Recommendations

ACCOUNTABILITY



In focusing on student-level accountability, the Task Force heard testimony regarding 3rd grade retention policies and saw mixed results. Many Florida policymakers and advocates, including those from the Foundation for Excellence in Education, were supportive of their decision to implement a 3rd grade retention policy and their results are compelling. They view retention as an imperfect alternative to promoting students who are unable to handle a 4th grade curriculum. However, researchers from the Chicago Consortium on Education Research believed the negatives of retention outweighed the positives. Differences in our nation's numerous retention policies could explain these differing conclusions.

After hearing testimony from the different groups, the Task Force unanimously decided against retention because there are too many other issues affecting our struggling students in Wisconsin that first need to be addressed. Wisconsin must first put in place reforms that hold adults accountable along with student-focused programs that ensure struggling students attend summer school. If, after these and the other reforms mentioned in this document are implemented, students continue to struggle with reading, the idea of again examining a grade-level retention policy may be an option.

In addition to student-level accountability, the Task Force also discussed different options to hold educators, schools, and districts accountable for chronic underperformance in reading. For example, the Task Force discussed how and to what extent school-wide reading should be emphasized in educator evaluation systems. The governor's office, teachers, DPI, and others are currently working to enhance educator effectiveness through the creation of new teacher and principal evaluation systems.

Furthermore, the Task Force discussed school and district-level accountability measures. For example, the Task Force heard testimony about extensive corrective action requirements, mandated by DPI, that are currently in place in the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) district.[xvii] These corrective action requirements have compelled MPS to adopt a comprehensive district-wide literacy plan, including a single reading curriculum, a robust RtI system, a series of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and extensive professional development. These

changes are beginning to show some hopeful signs. As the state continues its work to reform Wisconsin's school and district accountability system, additional emphasis could be placed on reading outcomes in both identifying schools and districts for intervention and in delivering the necessary support to schools and districts that need it.

Furthermore, districts, to a greater extent, can look to proven strategies to improve outcomes for students. This can be done through collaboration at all levels and through a renewed focus on methods that meet the federal definition for Scientifically Based Research which includes, "research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs."[xviii]

Read to Lead –Task Force Recommendations

ACCOUNTABILITY

The Read to Lead Task Force makes the following recommendations with regard to improving accountability:

- The Read to Lead Task Force encourages the Educator Effectiveness Design Team to consider reading outcomes in the design of its evaluation systems.
- The Read to Lead Task Force encourages the Wisconsin School Accountability Design Team to emphasize early reading proficiency as a key measure of Wisconsin's school and district accountability system. Schools and districts identified through this system as struggling with reading proficiency should be required to, at a minimum, implement scientific research-based reading screening and assessment tools, curriculum, and interventions. Each of these should be implemented along with ongoing quality professional development.
- Training on best practices is needed to ensure that educators and administrators have the knowledge they need to implement what has been proven to help kids who are struggling to read.
- In evaluating struggling schools and districts, the state should ensure that proven practices are used in the classroom. Wisconsin should also encourage the use of the federal What Works Clearinghouse and more stringently enforce the federal definition for scientific research-based practices. Additionally, the state must facilitate improved communication about effective strategies so all schools can learn from one another.
- The state should consider requiring all struggling readers, particularly those in early grades, to participate in a strong, evidence-based summer school program. Summer school should, however, be in addition to, not instead of, effective intervention throughout the school year. Further, Wisconsin should review its method of funding summer school to ensure that those struggling to meet proficiency are receiving the funds they need to attend summer school and that these programs are held accountable for their results.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

"Resources are out there for teachers and parents, but they aren't always easy to find. We need to do a better job of collecting these resources and making them available for parents and teachers seeking them out."

– Mara Brown, 1st Grade Teacher, Jefferson Elementary School - Oshkosh

No conversation concerning what happens when students are in the classroom can take place without also considering what happens when they are not. Some children in our state travel a tougher road to literacy. It is often left to our educators to help these students learn despite the disadvantages presented by poverty, family turmoil, and other factors. The recent economic downturn has only exacerbated this situation by drastically increasing the number of Wisconsin children living in poverty from 12% in 2000 to 19% in 2010.[xix]

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Research is clear that children from low-income families face more challenges than their peers who are not economically disadvantaged. For example, children from families in poverty enter preschool having heard up to 30 million fewer words than their peers from non-economically disadvantaged homes.[xx] Similarly, low-income children have access to fewer books in their homes than children from higher income families.[xxi]

Some programs aimed at improving parental involvement are already underway. The federal No Child Left Behind Act includes several parental involvement requirements for Title I schools: schools must build capacity for increased parental involvement and develop, with Title I parents, a written parent involvement policy that specifies parental and school responsibilities. Additionally, DPI sponsors or manages a number of programs aimed at improving reading outcomes through parental involvement including summer reading programs, family reading activities, and programs targeted at households in which English is not the primary spoken language.

The Read to Lead Task Force wishes to make it clear that, regardless of a child's background, we believe that all children can be successful readers. We must use every tool at our disposal to help children meet those expectations. Additionally, the Task Force believes that if its other recommendations are implemented, they will help all children, but especially children coming from difficult circumstances.

Education is absolutely crucial to breaking the cycle of poverty for our state's children. ***It should be the goal of every Wisconsinite to support all children as they seek to gain the foundational skills necessary to achieve success later in life.***

Of particular importance to the Task Force is the need to hold ALL adults accountable when ANY child cannot read at grade level. This includes classroom teachers who may need additional professional development and tools to support their instruction. However, this responsibility must also fall to school administrators, community members, local and state elected officials, and above all, parents. A child's most important teacher is his or her parents and while other stakeholders have a duty to engage parents, the ultimate responsibility falls to the parents themselves.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

The Read to Lead Task Force makes the following recommendations with regard to improving parental involvement:

- Support should be given to programs that put books into the hands of low-income children and encourage parents and caregivers to read to children.
- The state should support and encourage programs that provide parents and caregivers the skills necessary to foster better oral language and reading skill development in their children.
- The Task Force endorses programs like Reach Out and Read that provide outreach to low-income families during their well-baby checkups and other settings that are well attended by parents.
- The Task Force encourages general awareness and collaboration at the community level between adult literacy agencies and K-12 schools so that additional reading, writing and computer literacy skills can be sought out by parents wanting to improve their own literacy skills.

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

The Read to Lead Task Force sees these recommendations not as a final report, but as the beginning of a conversation.

Task Force members feel strongly that many teachers and schools in our state do a fantastic job teaching reading, but there is certainly room for improvement.

Even if each of the above recommendations were to be implemented overnight, change would not be. Wisconsin must recognize that our standards and expectations must change if we hope to prepare all of our students for careers in the 21st century. We must make changes in teaching and learning and recognize that the way we have always done things is no longer good enough. The members are optimistic, however, that we can see real gains in literacy if that effort is embraced not only by those directly involved in the education of our children, but by the state as a whole. The members pledge to continue to work together towards the implementation of these reforms and others aimed at improving reading outcomes.

In tough times, reading must remain a top priority. However, in both good times and bad, our priorities must motivate us to spend dollars more wisely and to continually reallocate them in furtherance of the results we seek. This report is an effort at doing just that. The Task Force members hope to improve reading by improving teacher preparation and professional development; screening, assessment and intervention; early childhood; accountability; and parental involvement. Yet even if these steps are to prove adequate for the challenges we face today, the Read to Lead Task Force challenges the leaders of our state and our fellow citizens to continually reevaluate and rethink how we can improve outcomes in the most crucial of gateway skills: reading.

NOTES

[i]Hernandez, Donald. "Double Jeopardy How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation." 2011: 3-4. Web. 29 Apr 2011. <http://www.aecf.org/~/media/Pubs/Topics/Education/Other/DoubleJeopardyHowThirdGradeReadingSkillsandPovery/DoubleJeopardyReport040511FINAL.pdf>.

[ii] Cecilia, Rouse. "The Labor Market Consequences of an Inadequate Education."*The Campaign for Educational Equity Fall 2005 Symposium on the "Social Costs of Inadequate Education" Fall 2005 Symposium on the "Social Costs of Inadequate Education*. New York, 2005: Web. 01 May 2011. <http://devweb.tc.columbia.edu/manager/symposium/Files/77_Rouse_paper.pdf>.

[iii] "Healthier and Wealthier: Decreasing Health Care Costs by Increasing Educational Attainment." Alliance for Excellent Education Nov. 2006: Web. 29 Apr 2011 <http://www.all4ed.org/files/HandW.pdf>

[iv] "The High Cost of High School Dropouts: What the Nation Pays for Inadequate High Schools." Alliance for Excellent Education 2008: Web. 29 Apr 2011. <http://www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/HighCost.pdf>

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[viii]U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), The Nation's Report Card: Trial Urban District Assessment Reading 2011. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/dst2011/2012455.asp>.

[ix] United States. U.S. Department of Education.Institute of Education Sciences.*Public High School Number of Graduates, Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR), and Estimated First-time 9th-graders, by State or Jurisdiction: School Year 2008–09*. National Center for Education Statistics, May 2011: Web. 30 May 2011. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/graduates/xls/table_01.xls>.

[x] Wisconsin. Department of Public Instruction.Teacher Education, Professional Development, and Licensing. PI 34 Index of Approved Programs at Wisconsin Institutions of Higher Education. 15 Nov. 2010: Web. 21 Aug. 2011. <http://dpi.wi.gov/tepdl/xls/indexed.xls>.

[xi] Current requirements can be found in Chapter PI34, Wisconsin Administrative Code.

[xii] Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), any public school teacher, elementary or secondary, who teaches a core academic subject (English, reading or language arts, math, science, history, civics and government, geography, economics, the arts, and foreign language) must be highly qualified.

Special education teachers and teachers of English language learners must be highly qualified if they teach core academic subjects to their students (ESEA Title I, Section 1119).

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[xvi] "85 percent of district offer 4K." Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction 2010 Web: 1 Oct. 2011 <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2010_152.pdf>

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