



Improved Early Reading Instruction and Intervention

Reading is the fundamental skill upon which all formal education depends. Research clearly shows that children who are poor readers at the end of first grade are never likely to acquire the reading skills they need to successfully complete elementary school—*unless these students are identified early in their school career and given the intensive, systematic intervention they require.* Any child who doesn't learn to read early and well will not easily master other skills and knowledge, and is unlikely to ever flourish in school or in life.

Low reading achievement, more than any other factor, is the root cause of chronically low-performing schools, which harm students and contribute to the loss of public confidence in our school system. When many children don't learn to read, the public schools cannot and will not be regarded as successful—and efforts to dismantle them will proceed.

Thanks to new scientific research—plus a long-awaited scientific and political consensus around this research—the knowledge exists to teach all but a handful of severely disabled children to read well. It is estimated that over 90 percent of students—including many now classified as learning disabled—could increase their reading skills to roughly average levels with intensive, early instruction delivered by skilled teachers.

Therefore, the AFT advocates that states and districts ensure that all K-3 teachers have the knowledge, resources and supports they need to implement high-quality early reading instruction for their students. To do so requires that the following elements of an effective reading program be in place:

- A **strong, core reading curriculum**—consistent with the research consensus on effective reading instruction and delivered by knowledgeable teachers—is essential for all students. A **carefully crafted approach to the teaching of reading** reflecting the research consensus that effective beginning reading instruction must include explicit, systematic, core classroom instruction in kindergarten through third grade on these essential components: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.
- All K-3 teachers should have access to **core reading instructional materials aligned with the research consensus**, which include both decodable texts with which students can practice their skills as well as rich children's literature and informational texts through which students' vocabulary, background knowledge and interest will be enhanced.

- To ensure that instruction is meeting every student's needs, teachers must have access to and use **appropriate reading assessment tools**: *screening measures* to identify children at risk of reading failure, *periodic progress monitoring* to ensure that instruction is appropriate and students are on track, and *diagnostic assessments* to identify special needs some students may have. Data from these assessments should inform instruction, small group placement, intervention and referral for special services.
- It is more effective to intervene early with struggling readers than it is to try to catch them after they've experienced long-term reading failure. Therefore, schools must provide **appropriate, timely, intensive, systematic intervention for those students who need it**; to do so may require both reallocation of current resources and new resources to implement such intervention. Our students deserve no less.
- Teachers can't teach what they haven't been taught; yet, too few teachers have been provided the necessary knowledge and skills in research-based reading instruction during their preservice or in-service preparation. Therefore, districts and schools must ensure that K-3 staff (and the administrators who support them) have opportunities for **high-quality professional development in early reading instruction**.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

To help ensure that state, district and school policies relating to early reading instruction and intervention are sound, state and local affiliate leaders must become as knowledgeable as

possible about what a comprehensive, effective, research-based early reading program entails. Armed with that knowledge, affiliate leaders can advocate effectively for such a program—and the requisite supports classroom teachers and other staff will need to meet students' instructional needs.

Then, wherever possible, collaborate with the district to select or develop curricula, to select instructional materials and assessments and to identify professional development needs. Then, again working in tandem with the district, develop appropriate ways to allocate resources and designate time into the schedule for dedicated reading instruction, intervention for students who need it and professional development for staff—including classroom paraprofessionals and principals.

Within the structure of affiliate governance and operations, give a high priority to efforts relating to improving early reading instruction. Designate a team of union leaders and members whose responsibility is to help troubleshoot ways in which members need union support/ intercession on matters relating to early reading instruction and intervention.

If possible, participate in the AFT's Educational Research and Dissemination (ER&D) training to learn how reading research has been translated and aligned with effective instructional practices. If ER&D is not an option, become involved in vetting and then participating in other professional development opportunities.

Collaborate with local organizations, including parent groups, to share information with parents and other caregivers about how they can help support their children's early reading achievement.

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EARLY READING INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION: EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

Here are brief descriptions of some of the work AFT affiliates have been doing to improve early reading instruction in their districts' schools.

Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP)

Building on a long tradition of several local affiliates that have been providing professional development to members through the AFT ER&D program, this state affiliate applied for and was selected to be the professional development provider for all K-3 teachers and literacy coaches in Reading First schools statewide. Reading First school staff complete two of several ER&D courses, Beginning Reading Instruction and Reading Comprehension Instruction. Like all ER&D courses, these provide participants with an understanding of the research as well as instructional strategies aligned to that research.

In addition, the state federation supports several local affiliates in districts identified as needing "intervention/corrective action." For instance, in Providence, the RIFTHP supports the local in its partnership with the district to use ER&D Beginning Reading Instruction to train teachers and develop curriculum for its Ramp Up Camp for incoming first- through third-graders experiencing reading difficulty.

Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association (CTA)

To address the educational needs of its lowest performing students, the Palm Beach County (Fla.) Classroom Teachers Association has partnered with the Palm Beach County School District to implement a pilot program in six high- needs schools. Recognizing the impact that knowledgeable teachers can make on improving student achievement, beginning in the 2006-07 school year, the CTA—with support from the AFT—provided ER&D professional development courses in Foundations of Effective Instruction and in reading instruction to all 400 teachers at two elementary schools, one alternative and one middle school, and two high schools. CTA will provide additional ER&D training during the 2007-08 school year.

Toledo Federation of Teachers

Six years ago, the Toledo (Ohio) Federation of Teachers partnered with the school district to create Toledo's Reading Academy, an initiative to improve early literacy. The Reading Academy provides professional development for teachers, a summer school for third- or fourth-graders who had failed the state reading test, and intensive interventions for students at risk for reading failure. More than 70 percent of summer school students pass the state test at the end of the summer, and the Reading Academy's intervention program, ACE (Achieving Content Excellence) is the largest of the 50-plus providers of supplemental educational services in the city.

RESOURCES

“The Importance of High-Quality Reading Instruction,” AFT’s Reading Web page at www.aft.org/topics/reading/index.htm.

“Preventing Early Reading Failure—and Its Devastating Downward Spiral: The Evidence for Early Intervention,” by Joseph Torgeson, *American Educator*, Fall 2004, www.aft.org/pubs-report/american_educator/issues/fall04/reading.htm.

“Nurturing Teacher Knowledge: How and Why Union-Led Professional Development Is Raising Reading Achievement,” by Neill S. Rosenfeld, *American Educator*, Winter 2006-07, www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/winter06-07/includes/rosenfeld.htm.

“Practicing Prevention—One District’s Success,” by Catherine Paglin, *American Educator*, Fall 2004, www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/fall04/prevention.htm.

“Teaching Decoding,” by Louisa C. Moats, *American Educator*, Spring/Summer 1998, www.aft.org/pubs-eports/american_educator/spring_sum98/moats.pdf.

“Drop Everything and Read—But How? For Students Who Are Not Yet Fluent, Silent Reading Is Not the Best Use of Classroom Time,” by Jan Hasbrouck, *American Educator*, Summer 2006, www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/summer06/fluency.htm.

“Reading Comprehension Requires Knowledge—of Words and the World: Scientific Insights into the Fourth-Grade Slump and Stagnant Reading Comprehension,” by E.D. Hirsch Jr., *American Educator*, Spring 2003, www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/spring2003/AE_SPRNG.pdf.



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