ALASKA LEGISLATURE COMMITTEE FILES 1997-1998 8672
9531 SENATE HEALTH EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES

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(a) A rehabilitation, liquidation, or conservation of a health maintenance organization is considered to be a rehabilitation, liquidation, or conservation of an insurer, and shall be conducted under AS 21.78. The director may apply to the superior court for an order directing the rehabilitation, liquidation, or conservation of a health maintenance organization upon one or more of the grounds contained in AS 21.78.040, 21.78.050, or 21.78.060, or if, in the director's opinion, the continued operation of the organization would be hazardous to either enrollees or to the people of the state.

(b) Enrollees of a health maintenance organization have the same priority in the event of liquidation or rehabilitation as AS 21.78 provides to policyholders of an insurer. A claim made by a health care provider in a liquidation or rehabilitation that pertains to services provided to an enrollee, has the same priority as an enrollee if the provider agrees not to assert the claim against an enrollee and if any payment fully discharges the obligation of the enrollee.

Sec. 21.86.220. Regulations.

The commissioner of health and social services may adopt regulations necessary to carry out the commissioner's duties under this chapter. The director may adopt regulations necessary to carry out the director's duties under this chapter.

Sec. 21.86.230. Fees.

(a) A health maintenance organization shall pay fees to the director as provided under AS 21.06.250.

(b) A health maintenance organization shall pay to the commissioner of health and social services fees, as established in regulations adopted by the commissioner of health and social services, that relate to the regulatory functions performed by that department under this chapter.

Sec. 21.86.240. Taxation.

A health maintenance organization is taxed as provided under AS 21.09.210(b)(1), and shall file the report required of an authorized insurer under AS 21.09.210(a).

Sec. 21.86.250. Penalties and enforcement.

(a) Instead of, or in addition to, suspending or revoking a certificate of authority, the director may, in an order issued under AS 21.86.200, impose an administrative penalty in an amount not less than $1,000 nor more than $25,000 for each violation of an applicable provision of this chapter or a regulation adopted under this chapter.

(b) The director may issue an order directing a health maintenance organization or a person representing a health maintenance organization to stop engaging in an act or practice that is in violation of this chapter or a regulation adopted under this chapter. Within five days after service of a stop

order under this subsection, the respondent may request, in writing, a hearing on the question of whether the act or practice has occurred in violation of this chapter or a regulation adopted by the director. The hearing shall commence within 10 days after the written request for the hearing has been received by the director unless the respondent requests that the hearing take place at a later date and the director agrees to the later hearing date.

Sec. 21.86.260. Statutory construction and relationship to other law.

(a) Except as provided in AS 21.36, AS 21.42, AS 21.54, AS 21.56 and in this chapter, this title does not apply to a health maintenance organization that obtains a certificate of authority under this chapter. This subsection does not apply to an insurer licensed under AS 21.09 or a hospital or medical service corporation licensed under AS 21.87 except with respect to its health maintenance organization activities authorized by and regulated under this chapter.

(b) Solicitation of enrollees by a health maintenance organization that has obtained a certificate of authority or by its licensed agents or authorized employee representatives, may not be construed to violate a law of this state relating to solicitation or advertising by health care professionals.

(c) A health maintenance organization that obtains a certificate of authority under this chapter is not considered to be practicing medicine, and is exempt from a law of this state relating to the practice of medicine. However, this subsection does not exempt a health care provider from a licensing requirement, or from another law of this state regarding providers.

Sec. 21.86.270. Filings and reports as public documents.

Except for information described in AS 21.86.100(b)(3) and except for trade secrets, privileged, confidential commercial, or financial information as determined by the director, all applications, filings, and reports required under this chapter, including annual financial statements that are required under AS 21.86.080, are public documents.

Sec. 21.86.280. Confidentiality of medical information.

Data or information pertaining to the diagnosis, treatment, or health of an enrollee or applicant that is obtained from that person, or from a provider, by a health maintenance organization shall be held in confidence and may not be disclosed except (1) to the extent necessary to carry out the purposes of this chapter; (2) upon the express consent of the enrollee or applicant; (3) under a statute or court order for the production of evidence or discovery; or (4) in the event of a claim or litigation between the person and the health maintenance organization regarding which the data or information is relevant. A health maintenance organization may claim a statutory privilege against disclosure that the provider who furnished the information to the health maintenance organization is entitled to claim.

Sec. 21.86.290. Contract authority for commissioner of health and social services.
In carrying out duties under this chapter, the commissioner of health and social services may contract with qualified persons to make recommendations concerning the determinations required to be made by the commissioner. Recommendations made by a contractor may be accepted in full or in part by the commissioner of health and social services.

Sec. 21.86.300. Acquisition of control or merger of a health maintenance organization.

(a) A person may not acquire control of the voting securities of a domestic health maintenance organization, if, after the consummation of the transaction, that person would, directly or indirectly, or by conversion or by exercise of any right to acquire, be in control of the health maintenance organization, or enter into an agreement to merge or consolidate with, or otherwise to acquire control of, a health maintenance organization.

(b) Subsection (a) of this section does not apply to a person who at the time the offer, request, or invitation is made or the agreement is entered into, or before the acquisition of the securities if no offer or agreement is involved, has filed with the director and has sent to the health maintenance organization, information required by AS 21.22 and the offer, request, invitation, agreement, or acquisition has been approved by the director. Approval by the director under this subsection is governed by AS 21.22.

(c) In this section

(1) "acquire control of " means to make a tender for, make a request or invitation for tenders of, enter into an agreement to exchange securities for, or acquire in the open market or otherwise;

(2) "domestic" means formed under the laws of this state.

Sec. 21.86.310. Dual choice.

(a) An employer in this state, whether public or private, that offers its employees a health benefit plan and employs 25 or more employees during any week of the calendar year, and an employee benefit fund in this state that offers its members any form of health benefit, shall make available to its employees or members the option to enroll in at least one health maintenance organization, holding a valid certificate of authority, that provides health care services in the geographic areas in which substantial numbers of the employees or members reside. If employees of the employer are members of a collective bargaining unit, the option of enrollment in a health maintenance organization shall first be submitted to the bargaining representative of the bargaining unit. If the option is approved by the bargaining representative, the option of enrollment shall then be made to each represented employee.

(b) An employer in this state is not required to pay more for employee health benefits as a result of the application of this section than would be required if this section did not apply to the employer. If an employee chooses

enrollment in a health maintenance organization, the employer is required to pay, on behalf of that employee, only an amount equal to the lesser of

(1) the amount that would have to be paid to an insurer on behalf of its employees for substantially similar health benefits; or

(2) the health maintenance organization's charge for coverage that is approved by the director under AS 21.86.070.

(c) This section does not apply to an employer whose employees or members reside in an area where health care services are not provided by a health maintenance organization.

Sec. 21.86.900. Definitions.

In this chapter,

(1) "affiliation period" means a period of time under a contract with a health maintenance organization

(A) that must expire before coverage becomes effective;

(B) during which the health maintenance organization is not required to provide health care services or benefits; and

(C) for which no premium is charged to the participant or beneficiary for coverage during the period;

(2) "agent" means a person who is appointed by a health maintenance organization and who engages in solicitation of membership in the organization; "agent" does not include a person enrolling health maintenance organization members on behalf of an employer, a union, or other organization to whom a master subscriber contract has been issued, or an employee, who is not an independent contractor, of the health maintenance organization;

(3) "basic health care services" means emergency care, inpatient hospital and physician care, and outpatient medical services, but does not include mental health services or services for alcohol or drug abuse;

(4) "beneficiary" has the meaning given in AS 21.54.500;

(5) "enrollee" means an individual who is enrolled in a health maintenance organization;

(6) "enrollment date" has the meaning given in AS 21.54.500;

(7) "evidence of coverage" means a certificate, agreement, or contract issued to an enrollee, setting out the coverage to which the enrollee is entitled;

(8) "group market" has the meaning given in AS 21.54.500;

(9) "health care services" means services for medical or dental care, or hospitalization, or services incident to the furnishing of that care or hospitalization, and includes services for the purpose of preventing, alleviating, curing, or healing human illness, injury, or physical disability;

(10) "health maintenance organization" means a person that undertakes to provide or arrange for basic health care services to enrollees on a prepaid basis;

(11) "health status factor" has the meaning given in AS 21.54.500;

(12) "participant" has the meaning given in AS 21.54.500;

(13) "person" has the meaning given in AS 01.10.060 and includes a joint venture;

(14) "preexisting condition exclusion" has the meaning given in AS 21.54.500;

(15) "provider" means a physician, hospital, or other person licensed or otherwise authorized in this state to furnish health care services;

(16) "uncovered expenditures" means the costs of health care services that are covered by a health maintenance organization, but for which an enrollee would also be liable if the organization became insolvent.

(17) "waiting period" has the meaning given in AS 21.54.500.

Alaska Chiropractic Society

P.O. Box 111507 • Anchorage, Alaska 99511-1507

January 12, 1998

Senator Dave Donley
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Donley:

On behalf of Alaska's chiropractic community, I want to thank you for introducing Senate Bill 197.

As you know, SB 197 makes three important changes to current law:

- Clarifies guidelines on access to chiropractic care by allowing patients direct access to a chiropractor of their choice and does not require prior consent of a medical doctor or registered nurse;

- Prohibits HMOs from having "gag" orders which prohibit physicians from discussing alternative treatment options; and

- Requires HMOs to clearly identify treatments that may be denied a patient which will minimize confusion about treatments that are not covered.

As evidenced by thousands of patient signatures on petitions in support of SB 197 and letters submitted under separate cover by Alaska's chiropractic community, this legislation is widely supported throughout Alaska.

On behalf of Alaskans throughout the state who value the benefits of chiropractic and Alaska's chiropractic community, thank you for your leadership and support on this issue.

Sincerely,

R H Banks

Dr. R. H. Banks
President
Alaska Chiropractic Society

Providence Health System in Alaska
Position Points Regarding
Senate Bill No. 197

I. OVERVIEW

The proposed legislative language in Senate Bill Number 197 to limit and/or control selected activities of Health Maintenance Organizations raises several issues:

1. Section 21.86.075 which mandates the provision of chiropractic health care services and limits the HMO's ability to select which providers to include in its contracting panel and define a process upon which services are approved will result in increased health care costs.

2. AS 21.86.150 (g)(4) which prohibits an HMO from offering financial incentives for denying or delaying health care services, needs to be clarified to specify clinical protocols for groups of individuals may be appropriate, but care cannot be denied or delayed on an individual basis.

II. SPECIFIC RESPONSES

A. Chiropractic Services

1. We are not giving testimony today regarding the appropriateness or inappropriateness of mandating chiropractic coverage by HMOs.

2. However, we are very concerned that to limit a Health Plan's ability to (a) define the benefit coverage it will offer, (b) select which providers will be included in its network, and (c) implement utilization management and referral authorization procedures will only lead to increased health care costs.

3. For good or bad, managed care organizations have dramatically reduced health care expenditures in this country. In 1996, health care inflation was only 1.9 percent, down from double digit inflation just a few years ago.

4. Managed care organizations have been able to do this through a variety of means such as (a) price competition - promise volume for discounts, (b) benefit design to encourage health and appropriate utilization, (c) utilization management, and (d) referral authorization based upon predefined clinical protocols.

5. By beginning the erosion of the basic elements that have helped HMOs control the dramatic rise in health care costs will only lead to renewed health care inflation.

6. Currently, the market provides people with a choice. They can select an insurance plan that provides them with open access to all providers and benefits or they can choose a managed care plan with its related limitations. The primary difference is usually cost.

7. If the legislature mandates to the market that HMOs must be more similar to traditional indemnity plans, the only thing we will accomplish is that there is no choice in the market and we will all pay the higher price of choice.

B. Physician Compensation

1. The proposed legislative language that states that an HMO may not permit "financial incentives to be given or offered to a provider for denying or delaying health care services" needs to be clarified.

2. There are multiple methodologies used across the country to reimburse physicians based upon their ability to standardize care and as a group determine what is the best pathway for delivering clinical services. Such as capitation, risk pools, shadow capitation, etc.

3. This language could be misconstrued to say that a group of physicians could not develop and implement clinical protocols for the delivery of health care services to a defined group of people.

4. And, without a mechanism to reimburse physicians for this level of creativity and problem solving, HMOs and other organizations may lose their ability to include physicians in defining clinical protocols.

5. Clinical protocols allow physicians to come to agreement regarding how clinical services should be provided given a certain set of conditions.

6. This methodology has helped dramatically to reduce the variation in clinical practices and also helped to reduce health care costs.

7. Stark II legislation clearly addresses the issue of you have outlined here regarding physician compensation for denying or delaying health care services. The federal government's position is that care may NOT be denied or delayed to an individual. However, physicians may define clinical protocol regarding how they will deliver care to groups of people and insurance companies can reimburse them for this level of participation in solving the problem of health care inflation.

8. We encourage that the House bill number 197 not be passed without eliminating or at least clarifying this language as discussed.

Cynthia S. Dodge, Ph.D.
Licensed Clinical Psychologist
2550 Denali St., Suite 1606
Anchorage, AK 99503
907/566-1119

Senator Gary Wilken
Chair Senate Health & Social Services Committee
State Capital
Juneau, AK

Dear Senator Wilken:

I am writing to you regarding SB 197, which relates to health care provided by health maintenance organizations. Requirements around informing enrollees of their HMO's benefits, limitations and procedures, as well as prohibiting limits on the free speech of health care providers, are important steps toward protecting consumer rights.

As the legislative advocate for the Alaska Psychological Association (AKPA), I want to comment on section 2 of SB 197, which lays out the process that HMO's must adhere to with regard to chiropractic services. This type of "freedom of choice" for the consumer is also a step in the right direction. Psychologists and psychological associates are particularly concerned that patients be allowed to continue to develop relationships with providers upon whom they rely and trust. The patient's ability to freely choose any licensed psychologist or psychological associate to assess and treat their mental health/substance abuse issues is critical for reasons of trust, confidentiality and treatment success. Thus, we would appreciate the opportunity to add language which includes our concerns for ensuring quality of care.

The Alaska Psychological Association thanks you for your efforts regarding this bill.

Sincerely,

Cynthia S Dodge

Cynthia S. Dodge Ph.D.
Licensed Psychologist
State Advocate for the Alaska Psychological Association

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS
ALASKA CHAPTER
318 4th Street, Juneau AK 99801
586-4438 Fax: 586-4439
naswak@alaska.net

January 19, 1998

Senator Gary Wilkin, Chair
Health Education and Social Services Committee
Alaska Senate
State Capitol
Juneau AK 99801

Re: SB 197

Dear Senator Wilkin:

The National Association of Social Workers Alaska Chapter is watching with interest SB 197, legislation to regulate some of the services and practices of HMO's doing business in Alaska. We believe that the State of Alaska should prepare for the inevitable, and begin the process of regulating managed care health systems.

NASW is very interested in protecting the role of professional social work services in any Alaskan managed care system. Social work has long been a recognized profession in Alaska, with social workers employed in public and private health and mental health care agencies, and in private clinical practice. Nationally, professional social workers provide 50% of all mental health services, and do so at reasonable cost to the consumer. We are interested in exploring the option of including social workers and social work services in legislation protecting specific provider groups operating in HMO's.

I have written to Senator Donley requesting a meeting to discuss possible language that could be included as an addition to Section 2 of the bill. I'd like to discuss the issue with you further during an appointment I've made with you on Tuesday, January 20 at 3:00pm.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and for your work on behalf of health care consumers in Alaska.

Sincerely,

Angela M. Salerno, Executive Director
NASW Alaska Chapter

PO Box 140351 Anchorage, AK 99514-0351
907-566-3749 (voice) 907-274-7897 (fax)

Alaska Physical Therapy Association

Fax

To:	The Honorable Dave Donley	**From:**	Kathy Volz, PT, President, AkPTA
Fax:	907-465-6595	**Pages:**	1
Phone:		**Date:**	January 20, 1998
Re:	Senate Bill No. 197	**CC:**	Senator Gary Wilkin, Sharon Macklin

x **Urgent** ☐ **For Review** ☐ **Please Comment** ☐ **Please Reply** ☐ **Please Recycle**

Dear Senator Donley,

I have recently been informed of the content of Senate Bill 197 and felt compelled to respond. I would like to thank you for your efforts to protect the rights of free speech of health care providers serving enrollees in a health maintenance organization as well as the rights of the enrollees themselves. As the President of the Alaska Chapter of the American Physical Therapy Association, representing over 180 licensed health care professionals in the state of Alaska, I would urge you to please allow us an opportunity to participate in this piece of legislation .

Health care is an issue affecting each and every citizen in the state and legislation affecting health care regulation should fully reflect this by promoting equity and inclusion of health care providers. I ask that you consider adding a provision to Senate Bill 197 allowing licensed physical therapists to participate in a manner similar to the licensed chiropractors.

Thank you for your serious consideration of this most important issue.

Kathy Volz, MS, MPT, PT

President, AkPTA

Alaska Nurse Practitioner Association

Alaska Nurse Practitioner Association
237 East Third Avenue
Anchorage, AK 99501

Lynn Hartz, Legislative Representative
phone 907-248-4677
fax 907-561-1257

January 20, 1998

The Honorable Dave Donley
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, (MS 3100) Room 204
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Re. SB 197 Chiropractic Care By HMO

Dear Senator Donley,

As the committee on Health Education and Social Services considers amending state statutes on health maintenance organizations to include chiropractic services, the Alaska Nurse Practitioner Association (ANPA) strongly urges that the Committee amend the proposed language to include Advanced Nurse Practitioners.

Rationale:

- Advanced nurse practitioners (ANPs) are certified and recognized by the State of Alaska as providers of primary health care services.
- Currently, ANPs in independent private practice are serving the Alaskan public in a variety of rural and urban settings.
- Studies show nurse practitioners provide comprehensive, high quality, cost-effective and health effective care.
- **Neglecting to include ANPs in legislation by intent or accident leaves them vulnerable to exclusion by HMOs.** An example already exists in the private sector. The Alaska Physician Network was established for the employees of Providence Hospital as part of a coordinated care option. Independent ANPs are not recognized by the Providence plan and enrollees may now only seek care with their preferred nurse practitioner at considerable financial cost.

We feel it is of the utmost importance to have ANPs included in bills such as SB 197. Only by specifically including nurse practitioners will our patients be assured of continued access to their health care provider of choice. Only by this type of recognition which you as legislators can provide will the people of Alaska continue have choices in their health care.

We appreciate your attention in this matter and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Lynn Hartz, MBN, ANP
ANPA Legislative Representative

cc. Senator Tim Kelly
Senator Gary Wilken

Post-it™ Fax Note 7671 | Date 1/21/98 | # of pages ▶ 1
To Senator W. I Ken | From Lynn Hartz
Co./Dept. | Co.
Phone # 907-452-3421 | Phone # 907-562-2465
Fax # 907-465-4714 | Fax # 907 561-1257

Gvo 1/19/98

Fax Transmittal

Providence | Health System

TO: Sheila Paterson

FAX NUMBER: 907 465-4714

FROM: Janet Oates, Director of Marketing & Government/Community Relations

PHONE: 907 261-4946 **FAX NUMBER:** 907 261-3048

DATE: 1/19/98

RE: SB 197

NUMBER OF PAGES: 4

Attached is a copy of the testimony we were anxiously waiting to present to the Committee on Friday morning from the Anchorage LIO. I had asked Quinn McKenna, our Providence Administrator for Managed Care and Alliances in Alaska to speak. But as you know, due to a communication failure, he was not able to address the Committee.

Both Quinn and I will be out of state on Wednesday. If SB 300 is put on the schedule then, **please be sure to contact Quinn who will ready to testify by phone** from our corporate offices in Seattle. His number will be 206 464-3355. If SB 300 is put on the Friday, Jan. 23 schedule, Quinn will be in Anchorage and able to testify from here. His office number here is 261-3134.

Janet Oates

3200 Providence Drive P.O. Box 99519-6604 Anchorage, Alaska 99519-6604 Tel. 907. 562-2211 FAX 907.261-3048

Providence Health System in Alaska
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Senate Bill No. 197

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SB 203

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA **BILL NO.** CSSSSB 203(HES)
1998 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Revision Date: 7-Apr-98 Dept. Affected: EDUCATION
Title: "An Act related to phonemic awareness" BRU: Teaching and Learning Support
Component: Quality Schools
Sponsor: Senator Taylor
Requester: Senate HES **COMPONENT SERIAL NO.** 2147

Expenditures/Revenues: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY99	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03	FY04
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS	*	*	*	*	*	*
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	*	*	*	*	*	*
CAPITAL EXPENDITURES	0	0	0	0	0	0
CHANGES IN REVENUES						

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts						
1003 GF Match						
1004 GF	*	*	*	*	*	*
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
Other:						
TOTAL	*	*	*	*	*	*

Estimate of current year (FY98) cost: $ $0

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME						
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

School District Costs - There will be significant costs to the school districts in Alaska to conduct two new levels of testing related to students in grades 1, 2, and 3 and to establish an alternative instructional program in language arts. Statewide costs for districts to implement the testing provisions of this bill range from $996.3 to $4,353.0. Costs related to establishing an alternative instructional program in language arts for each district cannot be estimated at this time. Without additional funding for school districts to implement the provisions of CSSSSB 203(HES), this will be an unfunded mandate. The total school district costs across the state cannot be determined at this time and is represented by an asterisk.

Prepared by: Barbara Thompson, Director Phone: 465-8727
Division: Teaching and Learning Support Date: 4/10/98

Approved by Commissioner: Shirley J. Holloway, Ph.D. Date: 4/10/98
Agency: Department of Education

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Additional Analysis

This legislation seeks to ensure that all public school elementary students receive adequate language arts education, requires school districts to adopt a balanced approach to language arts instruction, and encourages elementary schools to begin preparing students for the high school graduation examination. Mandatory testing of all students in second and third grades is required annually using a nationally normed test. Testing in the first grade is optional. Additional, individual diagnostic testing is required for students who test in the lowest 25% of the nationally normed test. For elementary schools in which a student in a grade tests at or below the 25th percentile rank, an alternative instructional program in language arts shall be established.

The Department of Education shall provide the names of one group administered and one individually administered nationally normed test. Providing multiple test options would result in data that could not be compared across districts throughout the state.

There are significant costs to school districts to implement the provisions of CSSSSB 203(HES). Without additional funding, school districts will face an unfunded mandate to provide two new levels of testing for students in grades 1, 2, and 3, and to establish an alternative instructional program in language arts for any student testing at or below the 25th percentile rank.

The Department estimates the costs to school districts to implement the provision of CSSSSB 203(HES) to range from $996.3 to $4,353.0. These estimates are based on the following assumptions:

- 10,000 children in each of the following grades: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd
- Costs reflect testing all children in all grades. While the bill mandates annual testing of 2nd and 3rd grade students only, school districts may choose to test all 1st grade students.
- Costs reflect testing all students, in all three grades using group-administered tests and individualized tests for the annual testing, using qualified personnel. School districts may use either method, according to this bill.
- Costs reflect conducting individualized tests for 25% of students in grades 1, 2, and 3, who score at or below the 25th percentile rank, using qualified personnel. This number would conservatively total 7,500.

If all school districts used a group administered test for the initial annual testing and used an individualized test for 25% of the students who scored at or below the 25th percentile rank, the cost is estimated to be $996.3.

If all school districts used an individualized test for the initial annual testing and used an individualized test for 25% of the students who scored at or below the 25th percentile rank, the cost is $4,353.0.

Estimated costs for the establishment of alternative instructional programs in language arts have not been included in this fiscal note, as insufficient information is available.

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA
1998 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. SSSB 203

Revision Date: 5-Mar-98
Dept. Affected: EDUCATION
Title: Language Education
BRU: Teaching and Learning Support
Component: Quality Schools
Sponsor: Senator Taylor
Requester: Senate HESS
COMPONENT SERIAL NO. 2147

Expenditures/Revenues: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY99	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03	FY04
PERSONAL SERVICES	150.0	150.0	150.0	150.0	150.0	150.0
TRAVEL	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0
CONTRACTUAL	792.0	792.0	792.0	792.0	792.0	792.0
SUPPLIES	161.0	161.0	161.0	161.0	161.0	161.0
EQUIPMENT	9.0	9.0	9.0	9.0	9.0	9.0
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**
CAPITAL EXPENDITURES	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
CHANGES IN REVENUES						

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts	0	0	0	0	0	0
1003 GF Match	0	0	0	0	0	0
1004 GF	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
Other:						
TOTAL	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**

Estimate of current year (FY98) cost: $ $0

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	2					
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

Please see attached analysis of estimated costs.

Prepared by: Barbara Thompson, Director
Phone: 465-8727
Division: Teaching and Learning Support
Date: 3/20/98

Approved by Commissioner: Shirley J. Holloway, Ph.D.
Date: 3/20/98
Agency: Department of Education

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Additional Analysis

This legislation seeks to ensure that all public school elementary students receive adequate language instruction. Mandatory testing of all students in first, second, and third grades is required annually. Additional diagnostic testing is required for students who test at or below the 25th percentile rank. For elementary schools in which a majority of students in a grade test at or below the 25th percentile rank for three consecutive years, intensive systematic phonics and spelling instruction must be included in the curriculum of the school.

This fiscal note represents funding necessary to implement, administer and maintain two levels of testing at the state and local levels; compilation, analysis and reporting of test information; and assistance for schools required to implement a new language education curriculum, as a result of testing data.

This request will fund staff necessary to:

- Provide technical assistance and training for teachers and school staff related to the administration of tests
- Provide technical assistance and training for teachers, school staff, parents, and community members to better help our young children to be successful readers
- Identify and disseminate information and models on promising practices, standards-based reading instruction and assessment, and program development. The teaching of phonics is embedded in these activities.
- Compile, analyze and report on school and statewide test data, as related to all requirements of SSSB 203

Funding included in this fiscal note represents the following:

Personal Services – $150.0

This will provide funding for a full-time Education Specialist II, Range 21, to provide training and technical assistance to teaching staff in school districts across the state. This position will be responsible for ensuring that a language education curriculum is developed and implemented, when necessary and will ensure that staff are trained to teach the components of this curriculum, including phonics, in the context of a total reading program. This staff person will prepare school and statewide reports related to the testing data that is gathered.

This funding will also provide funding for a full-time Research Analyst III to compile and analyze statewide testing data and prepare statistical reports and information for schools and for public dissemination.

Travel - $15.0

This funding will allow department staff to provide direct training and technical assistance to school districts in matters relating to language education curriculum development and implementation and test administration.

Contractual - $792.0
This will provide basic scoring services for the standardized tests; funding for school district staff training and administration of individual diagnostic tests; contractual costs related to researching and disseminating information and model language education programs, and general costs for phone, fax, copier and printing.

Supplies – $161.0
These funds will be used to purchase necessary testing materials (booklets, directions, examiner kits); office supplies and educational materials, as needed to compile, analyze, and report on testing data.

Equipment – $9.0
These funds will be used to purchase the necessary computer and office equipment for the new staff positions and ongoing upgrade and replacement costs.

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA **BILL NO.** SB 203
1998 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Revision Date:
Dept. Affected: EDUCATION
Title: Literacy Restoration Act
BRU: Teaching and Learning Support
Component: Quality Schools
Sponsor: Senator Taylor
Requester: Senate HES
COMPONENT SERIAL NO. 2147

Expenditures/Revenues: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY99	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03	FY04
PERSONAL SERVICES	75.0	75.0	75.0	75.0	75.0	75.0
TRAVEL	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0
CONTRACTUAL	150.0	150.0	150.0	150.0	150.0	150.0
SUPPLIES	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
EQUIPMENT	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	**250.0**	**245.0**	**245.0**	**245.0**	**250.0**	**245.0**
CAPITAL EXPENDITURES	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
CHANGES IN REVENUES						

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts	0	0	0	0	0	0
1003 GF Match	0	0	0	0	0	0
1004 GF	**250.0**	**245.0**	**245.0**	**245.0**	**250.0**	**245.0**
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
Other:						
TOTAL	**250.0**	**245.0**	**245.0**	**245.0**	**250.0**	**245.0**

Estimate of current year (FY98) cost: $

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	1					
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

This legislation requires that phonics be taught in kindergarten through third grades in the public school system. Research favors a balanced approach to the teaching of reading. The department strongly supports this balanced approach. In the context of a total reading program, phonics is an important component.

Please see attached analysis of estimated costs.

Prepared by: Barbara Thompson, Director
Phone: 465-8727
Division: Teaching and Learning Support
Date: 2/19/98

Approved by Commissioner: Shirley J. Holloway, Ph.D. /s/ Shirley Holloway
Date: 2/19/98
Agency: Department of Education

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Additional Analysis

This legislation seeks to ensure that all students become competent readers by requiring that phonics be taught in kindergarten through third grades in the public school system. Research favors a balanced approach to the teaching of reading. The department strongly supports this balanced approach. In the context of a total reading program, phonics is an important component.

Reading is the most important indicator of student success. This fiscal note represents funding that is requested in the Governor's FY99 Operating Budget for a statewide reading initiative to ensure that all children will read at or above grade level by the fourth grade. This request will fund staff resources necessary to provide technical assistance and training for teachers, school staff, parents, and community members to better help our young children to be successful readers. Additionally, information and models on promising practices, standards-based reading instruction and assessment, and program development will be identified and disseminated. The teaching of phonics is embedded in these activities.

Additionally, SB 257/HB351, the Quality Schools Bill, includes performance standards for reading, which address phonics at the first benchmark (ages 5-7). This bill also provides for a comprehensive assessment system to ensure that students meet these performance standards.

Funding included in this fiscal note represents the following:

Personal Services - $75.0

This will provide funding for a full-time Education Specialist II, Range 21, to provide training and technical assistance to teaching staff in school districts across the state. This position will be responsible for ensuring that a phonics curriculum is developed and implemented and that staff are trained to teach phonics, in the context of a total reading program.

Travel - $15.0

This funding will allow the department's education specialist to provide direct training and technical assistance to school districts.

Contractual - $150.0

This will provide funding for school district staff participation in training, contractual costs related to researching and disseminating information and model reading programs, and general costs for phone, fax, copier and printing.

Supplies - $5.0

These funds will be used to purchase the necessary educational materials and office supplies.

Equipment - $5.0

These funds will be used to purchase the necessary computer and office equipment for the new staff position and ongoing upgrade and replacement costs.

[redacted] SENATE COMMITTEE RE[redacted]
First Committee of Referral

DATE: 3/5/98 FURTHER:

Date of 5-Day Notice: 3/19/98
(in accordance with Uniform Rule 23)

DATE TURNED IN TO OFFICE: 4/9/98

HESS Committee considered SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 203

"An Act relating to phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, reading comprehension strategies, and testing for basic reading and reading comprehension skills in the public school system."

and recommends:

[✓] be **replaced** with ____ CS SS SB 203 (HES)

[ ] adopt **previous** ____ CS ____ (____)

[ ] attached amendment(s)

[ ] adopt Letter of Intent by ____ Committee

[ ] further referral to the ____ Committee

Senate Bill:
[✓] same title
[ ] new title

House Bill:
[ ] same title
[ ] technical title
[ ] new: SCR#____

SIGNING/DO PASS	DP	OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS	NR	DNP	AM
Drew D. Shaw	✓	Greg Ellis	X		
Doug Wardt	✓				
Lydia Thorn	✓				
CHAIR: Gary Wilson	✓	CHAIR:			

NEW FISCAL NOTE(S):

Department	Date	Zero	Fiscal
SSSB DOE	3/20/98		$1.127
DOE for CS SSSB 203 (HES)			
forthcoming			

PREVIOUS FISCAL NOTE(S):*

Department	Date	Zero	Fiscal

[ ] **APPROPRIATION -- no fiscal note**

***include fiscal notes accompanying Governor's bill**

0-LS1002\H
Ford
2/19/98

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 203( )

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTIETH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY

Offered:
Referred:

Sponsor(s): SENATOR TAYLOR

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

"An Act relating to phonics and spelling in the public school system."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

*** Section 1.** SHORT TITLE. This Act may be known as the Literacy Restoration Act.

*** Sec. 2.** FINDINGS. The legislature finds that

(1) the English language is the common language of the United States of America;

(2) written English is based on the principle of the alphabet, and that English is a phonetic language;

(3) it is the existing practice of some public schools to teach phonics only incidentally;

(4) scientific research proves that direct, systematic phonics and spelling should be a part of the elementary curriculum in the public schools;

(5) a recent Education Week report card gave students in Alaska a D minus grade; and

(6) according to the California Achievement Test, 45 percent of children in the

fourth grade in Alaska had below average basic reading and language skills.

* **Sec. 3.** AS 14.30 is amended by adding a new section to read:

Article 12. Required Language Education.

Sec. 14.30.800. Required language education curriculum. (a) A governing body shall include intensive systematic phonics and spelling instruction in the curriculum for elementary school, beginning in kindergarten if kindergarten is offered. In kindergarten, or early in first grade if the district does not offer kindergarten, the language education curriculum must include, in addition to children's literature, explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, and reading comprehension strategies.

(b) All students in the first, second, and third grades shall be tested for basic reading and reading comprehension skills, using a nationally normed group-administered test approved by the department. Testing shall be conducted in the fall of each school year. The individual results of tests required under this subsection must be provided to each student's parent or guardian and to the principal of the school. Group results for each grade level in the school must be provided to each student's parent or guardian, to the school district, to the commissioner, and to the legislature. A student in the first, second, or third grade who tests at or in the lowest 25 percent of the nationally normed test, or a student who a parent or teacher believes has a reading, writing, spelling, or math learning problem, shall also be tested for word-attack and word identification skills, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, using a nationally normed and individually administered test approved by the department.

(c) When hiring an elementary school teacher, a school district shall give a hiring preference to a teacher who has completed a course in the language basis of reading. The course required under this subsection must include phonemic awareness, letter and sound correspondence, work-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, comprehension strategies, and an overview of reading disabilities.

(d) In this section,

(1) "elementary school" means grades kindergarten through six;

(2) "phonics instruction" means direct instruction, assessment, and

practice designed to ensure learning and use of the English alphabet in reading;

(3) "school district" means a municipal school district or a regional educational attendance area.

0-LS1002\C
Ford
4/7/98

EXISTING

NEW

CS FOR SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 203(HES)

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTIETH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY THE SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Offered:
Referred:

Sponsor(s): SENATOR TAYLOR

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

"An Act relating to phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, reading comprehension strategies, and testing for basic reading and reading comprehension skills in the public school system."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

*** Section 1.** PURPOSE. It is the purpose of this Act to

(1) ensure that all public school elementary students receive adequate language arts education;

(2) require school districts to adopt a balanced approach to language arts instruction that includes intensive systematic phonics and spelling instruction in the elementary school curriculum, along with other methods of instruction, in order to increase skills in reading, writing, and spelling; and

(3) encourage elementary schools to begin preparing public school students for the high school graduation examination.

* **Sec. 2.** AS 14.30 is amended by adding a new section to read:

Article 12. Language Arts Education.

Sec. 14.30.800. Language arts education curriculum. (a) All students in the second and third grades shall be tested for basic reading and reading comprehension skills using a nationally normed test approved by the department. A district may test students in the first grade as described in this subsection. Testing shall be conducted in the fall of each school year. The individual results of tests required under this subsection must be provided to each student's parent or guardian and to the principal of the school. Results for each grade level in the school must be provided to each student's parent or guardian, to the school district, to the commissioner, and to the legislature. A student in the first, second, or third grade who tests at or in the lowest 25 percent of the nationally normed test, or a student who a parent or teacher believes has a reading, writing, spelling, or math learning deficiency, shall also be tested for word-attack and word identification skills, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, using a nationally normed and individually administered test approved by the department.

(b) If a student tested under (a) of this section tests at or below the 25th percentile of the nationally tested students, a governing body shall establish an alternative instructional program in language arts that is intended to improve the student's basic reading and reading comprehension skills. The alternative instructional program must include, in addition to children's literature, explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, and reading comprehension strategies.

(c) Upon request, the department shall provide a list of those nationally normed tests that are approved by the department.

#1

AMENDMENT

BY: SENATOR Ward

TO: SSSB 203

Page 2, Line 13:

Delete: "a majority"

Insert: "25 percent or more"

Revised Amendments from the Alaska Department of Education
March 28, 1998 – 5:00 pm

BILL ID: SSSB 203

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 203

"An Act relating to [phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, reading comprehension strategies, and testing for basic reading and reading comprehension skills] using a balanced approach for reading and language arts instruction in the public school system."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

* Section 1. PURPOSE. It is the purpose of this Act to ensure that all public school elementary students receive adequate language arts education. [If the public school students of a school district fall below the national average for language education,] [i]It is [also] the purpose of this Act to [encourage the] require school districts to adopt a balanced approach to reading and language arts instruction which includes intensive systematic phonics and spelling instruction in the elementary school curriculum, along with instruction in word meaning in context, the structure of the English language, and other methods of instruction appropriate to the needs of each child, in order to [increase skills in reading, writing, and spelling] meet high student standards in reading and language arts.

* Sec. 2. AS 14.30 is amended by adding a new section to read:

Article 12. Language Arts Education.

Sec. 14.30.800. Language arts education curriculum. (a) [All s] Students in the first, second, and third grades shall be [tested for basic reading and reading comprehension skills, using a nationally normed group-administered test approved by the department. Testing shall be conducted in the fall of each school year.] assessed for reading and language arts difficulties if the classroom teacher determines that the child is not making adequate progress towards meeting

the student standards in reading and language arts. The student standards will include the areas of phonics, spelling, word meaning in context, the structure of the English language, writing, listening, speaking, and other language arts standards appropriate for the child's age. The department shall develop and score an examination that assesses the student standards for students aged 5-7 years old and for students aged 8-10 years old. All students shall be assessed using these standards-based assessments. The student standards along with the related assessments will be benchmarked against the academic standards and assessments of other high-achieving states. The individual results of tests required under this subsection must be provided to each student's parent or guardian and to the principal of the school. Results for each grade level in the school must be provided to each student's parent or guardian, to the school district, to the commissioner, and to the legislature. [A student in the first, second, or third grade who tests at or in the lowest 25 percent of the nationally normed test, or a student who a parent or teacher believes has a reading, writing, spelling, or math learning problem, shall also be tested for word-attack and word identification skills, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, using a nationally normed and individually administered test approved by the department.]

(b) If a [majority of the] student[s in a grade level tested under (a) of this section tests at or below the 25th percentile of the nationally tested students for three consecutive school years] fails the assessment of the student standards in reading and language arts for ages 5-7 or for ages 8-10, a governing body shall [include intensive systematic phonics and spelling instruction in the curriculum for elementary school.] establish an alternative instructional program in reading and language arts which will address the student's deficiencies. The [language education curriculum] alternative instructional program must include, in addition to children's literature, explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, and reading comprehension strategies and other areas of deficiencies.

* Sec. 3. REQUIRED REPORT. By January 31, 1999, the department shall provide a report to the legislature containing the standards referenced in Sec.1 and 2 of this Act.

Alaska State Legislature

Chairman,
Judiciary Committee

Member,
Resources Committee
Rules Committee
Committee on Committees

State Capitol
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(907) 465-3873
Fax: (907) 465-3922

352 Front Street
Ketchikan, Alaska 99901
(907) 225-8088
Fax: (907) 225-0713

Senator Robin L. Taylor
Senate Majority Leader

TO: Senator Gary Wilken, Chair
Senate Health, Education and
Social Services Committee

FROM: Senator Robin Taylor R.L.T.

DATE: February 5, 1998

RE: Senate Bill 203 "An Act requiring systematic phonics and spelling be taught in kindergarten through third grades in the public school system."

We have a serious problem in our public school system. Our children are not learning basic reading and writing skills. This is in large part due to the "whole language" system of instruction which utilizes a "see and guess" method of learning. Scientific studies have proven that the majority of children do far better when taught systematic phonics than when taught with the "whole language" approach.

Some students will learn to read regardless of what method of instruction is used. It is believed that this small percentage of students come from upper middle class families where there has been some phonics instruction in the home before the child ever comes to the classroom. There is also a small percentage of children who will have difficulties in learning to read no matter what method is used. This bill is aimed at those students in the middle which comprise the vast majority of the children in the public school system.

Test scores comparing two groups of students, one group having been taught with whole language methodology and one group having been taught with systematic phonics, have consistently been higher for the

group having been taught systematic phonics than for those who have only had the whole language approach.

Senate Bill 203 will require school districts to implement a reading program teaching systematic phonics and spelling in all grades K through 3 in the public school system. I should note here that this bill does not do away with whole language programs in our public schools. It simply requires that districts incorporate a program of systematic phonics and spelling into the Language Arts program in all elementary schools.

Alaska State Legislature

Chairman,
Judiciary Committee

Member,
Resources Committee
Rules Committee
Committee on Committees

State Capitol
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(907) 465-3873
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552 Front Street
Ketchikan, Alaska 99901
(907) 225-8088
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Senator Robin L. Taylor
Senate Majority Leader

SPONSOR STATEMENT

Senate Bill 203

"An Act requiring that phonics be taught in kindergarten through third grades in the public school system"

Illiteracy in the United States is growing at an alarming rate, and Alaska is no exception. This places enormous demands on resources from all levels of government and society. According to the International Reading Association, our classrooms have been used by psychologists, sociologists, educationists, and politicians as a giant laboratory for unproven, untried theories of learning, all resulting in the near collapse of the public education system.

According to information obtained from the Alaska Department of Education, 51% of our students are in some type of supplemental program. CAT scores for fourth graders showed 21.3% in the bottom 25% in reading and 25.5% in the bottom 25% in language. In grade 11, 24.1% scored in the bottom 25% in reading. We are graduating illiterates. We must get back to the tried and true method of teaching our students how to read. We must reinitiate intensive phonics instruction into our elementary education curriculum.

Here are some statistics gathered by the National Adult Literacy Survey:

- 24 million adult Americans can't read; 50 million are limited to a 4th or 5th grade reading level;
- the number of functionally illiterate adults is increasing by approximately 2.25 million per year;
- eighty-four percent of the 23,000 people who took an exam for entry-level jobs at NY Telephone in 1988, failed.
- More than half of Fortune 500 companies have become educators of last resort with the cost of remedial employee training reaching more than 300,000 million dollars per year.

- One estimate places the yearly cost in welfare programs and unemployment compensation due to illiteracy at 6 billion dollars. An additional 237 billion dollars a year in unrealized earnings is forfeited by persons who lack basic reading skills, according to Literacy Volunteers of America.
- The total amount of money being spent on illiteracy by the federal government alone can only be guessed at because there has never been a complete assessment prepared. A conservative estimate would place the amount at more than ten billion dollars each year, and growing.

Alaska is part of these statistics. We have a problem! Senate Bill 203 will help fix this problem by mandating that systematic phonics instruction be added to the language arts programs for grades K through 3 in all public schools in Alaska.

The National Right to Read Foundation

ɔundations in Reading

Essential Elements of Reading Instruction in Grades K-3

Introduction

Reading, writing, spelling, and handwriting are the foundation tools of literacy. They can be seen, heard, and measured. They are portable. But unless these language/literacy tools are in place by the end of third grade, children will have no firm academic ground on which to stand. Nothing else learned in school will ever make up for the deficit.

School officials should be able to document how students are learning the skills listed below, and make the information available to parents in an understandable way.

Mastering the tools of learning in language, and becoming confident in their use, requires systematic instruction across grades, and lots of supervised practice in applying these tools to reading and writing.

Whatever else a school claims to teach, if students don't master the foundation skills of language, nothing else really matters.

Following are baseline performance skills in language that must be learned in grades K-3. These skills are what every child of normal sight, hearing and intelligence should be able to do, and what the school must be prepared to measure. Advanced skills and creativity are built on this foundation. Without these foundational skills, many children will experience a lifetime of reading frustration.

Read More
Return to Home Page

The National Right to Read Foundation

Literacy Statistics in America

- At the opening of the 20th century the United States' literacy rate was approaching 100% for those who had attended school;
- A U.S. Department of Labor Survey found that nearly 20% of high school graduates can't even read their own diplomas;
- The National Adult Literacy Survey, issued in the fall of 1993, found that 42 million adults (22%) can't read;
- The 1994 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) found that only 25% of 4th graders and 8th graders, and just over 33% of 12th graders, scored at the "Proficient" or "Advanced" levels of reading;
- Conversely, NAEP found that 75% of 4th graders scored BELOW the proficient level of reading;
- Education expenditures reached $484 billion in the1993-94 school year, with 59% being spent at the Elementary and Secondary school level;
- There are nearly 43 million elementary and secondary students in our public schools, and 2.9 million teachers;
- Federal and state Special Education programs cost taxpayers more than $40 billion annually, and 80% of those students are of normal sight hearing and intelligence. They simply haven't been taught to read;
- U.S. Justice Department estimates find that nearly 85% of juvenile delinquents can't read;
- In 1995, The Journal of the American Medical Association claimed that 33 percent of patients receiving prescription drugs can't read the labels;
- Industry estimates that more than $300 billion dollars is being spent on employee remediation, with $250 billion more being lost due to illiteracy;
- Almost half of college freshman have to take "bonehead English" because their reading skills are deficient.

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The National Right to Read Foundation

Research from the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development

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The following information has been taken from studies supported by the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development and documented in a paper entitled "Research in Learning Disabilities at the NICHD". For the full report, contact NICHD at 6100 Building, Room 4B05, 9000 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20892 or call (301) 496-6591.

The ability to decode single words accurately and fluently is dependent upon the ability to segment words and syllables into abstract individual sound units (phonemes).

The best predictor of reading ability/disability from kindergarten and first grade test performance is phoneme segmentation ability.

Reading disabilities (dyslexia) affect at least 10 million children, or approximately 1 child in 5.

Studies show that of the children who are reading disabled in the third grade, 74 percent remain disabled in the ninth grade. Reading disability reflects a persistent deficit rather than a developmental lag in linguistic and reading skills.

Disabled readers do not readily acquire the alphabetic code when learning to read due to deficiencies in the processing of phonological processing. As such, disabled readers must be presented highly structured, explicit and intensive instruction in phonics rules and the application of the rules to print.

Systematic structured phonics instruction results in more favorable outcomes in reading than does a context-emphasis (Whole Language) approach.

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The National Right to Read Foundation

FACT SHEET: Can You Trust The "Research?"

"Everyone seems to think that all you need to do to be a good teacher is to love to teach. But no one thinks that all you need to do to be a good surgeon is to love to cut." Adam Urbanski, Vice President, American Federation of Teachers.

Lengthy bibliographies of "studies" supporting various techniques in reading are shot back and forth between proponents of phonics and whole language in an effort to provide conclusive evidence that their perspective is correct. Bewildered parents, school board members, legislators and interested observers look on with little knowledge or understanding of what is actually referred to in these seemingly well documented lists of studies.

In the hard sciences, like physics, chemistry, biology, medicine and engineering, references to research studies are more likely to be helpful to "practitioners" or those searching for solutions to complicated, often cutting edge problems, because careful documentation of findings are recorded, checked and double checked, before any thought of application is considered. Peer review panels are convened to scrutinize every aspect of the study. Useful research should arrive at reliable predictions using a scientific method of inquiry. This approach to research should "separate quackery from best practice."[1]

Education Research is altogether different. Here is how most education "research" is conducted: (1) Build the theory; (2) Test the theory; (3) Replicate the results in large-scale studies in classrooms, schools or district wide implementations; (4) No objective evaluation using control groups is conducted. And, theories of learning abound. For decades educators have followed the theories of developmental psychologist John Jacques Piaget. Piaget never

d to teach children, he only tried to describe what they do at different ages."[2] Yet in our public schools today developmentally appropriate practice," which undergirds whole language and almost all "child centered" educational programs, has become almost sacred. Anyone daring to challenge the underlying premises of these theories is considered "unprofessional" or just ignorant.

For example, block scheduling and an integrated curriculum, now the rage in our schools, has no empirical scientific evidence to support its educational value.[3] Cooperative learning, another fine sounding theory, is one of the most widely used innovations of our time, and yet is often implemented without clear goals or any individual accountability.

Educational literature now includes citations that look impressive. Names, dates, well known journals, and often prestigious Universities are listed as confirmation that the theories presented have been carefully researched and tested, when what is being cited is often nothing more than opinion laced with "happy faced" anecdotal stories.

"A small number of prolific professionals with strong beliefs can write a great deal and quote each other's ideas. This creates a circular knowledge base that may appear to be research, but which can, in fact, just be "bull."[5]

Ken Goodman, one of the most prolific writers and proponents of whole language, conducted a "research" study in New Zealand in 1965. His findings have served as one of the main stays of current whole language practice in America. Specifically, Goodman found that "children's reading accuracy improved 60% - 80% in context, in comparison with a [word] list. However, Tom Nicholson, Professor of Education at the University of Auckland, New Zealand twice replicated Goodman's study, and found that this classic study that supported "enlightened [word] guessing is incorrect..."[6] This is especially important because in today's "whole language," "balanced approach" ssrooms guessing at words by context to identify them is strongly recommended as one of the three "cueing tems" essential in how a child learns to read. Thus, Ken Goodman's research advocating the use of context clues to identify unknown words is bogus. Does Dr. Nicholson's finding change how most teachers are teaching our children to read? Not in the least. If the scientific method were used to validate educational programs there would be: (1) Development of an hypothesis; (2) Testing the hypothesis by formal experiment; (3) Analyzing data to determine the truth of the hypothesis; (4) Peer review, replication of the experiment, large-scale and/or long-term follow-up

studies. Parents should be told [redacted] children are in experimental classroom[redacted] and schools should ask parents' permission to include their children in such experiments.

One federal education research study, Project Follow Through, conducted over the past twenty five years, did apply scientific method. It cost the taxpayers more than one billion dollars, and funding only ceased in 1995. The goal of the study was to identify the specific teaching methods that could raise the performance levels of America's poorest schools from the 20th percentile (the normal level of performance for children in poverty) up to the 50th percentile (even with mainstream America). The results of this massive study were conclusive. Direct instruction, (one of the Follow Through models) included direct, systematic instruction in phonics as one component, and was found to be "the only program which consistently produced substantial progress"[7] in reading. Project Follow Through also evaluated the "child centered," "developmentally appropriate practices" model that relied almost exclusively on a form of instruction that could be called "relevant activity." The goal of this model was to "develop problem solving abilities, healthy self-concepts, and culturally pluralistic attitudes and behaviors."[8] Not only did the "child centered" approach fall far short in reaching its goals, but students in the Direct Instruction Model improved their academic skills in reading, writing and mathematics, while at the same time enhancing their self-esteem and problem solving abilities.

The lack of rigor in testing most educational theories, including whole language and its clones, and its implication for policy makers should be obvious. Students who are taught direct, systematic phonics develop reading skills far superior to those exposed to the unproven whole language philosophy. If schools are going to use unproven theories, they should do so only if parents approve, and they should be held accountable for the results. These studies have been conducted using the "scientific method,"and the findings are based on empirical evidence.

A bibliography of studies is available from The National Right to Read Foundation.

End Notes

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The National Right to Read Foundation

ILLITERACY:
An Incurable Disease or Education Malpractice?

by
Robert W. Sweet, Jr.

"Learning to read is like learning to drive a car. You take lessons and learn the mechanics and the rules of the road. After a few weeks you have learned how to drive, how to stop, how to shift gears, how to park, and how to signal. You have also learned to stop at a red light and understand road signs. When you are ready, you take a road test, and if you pass, you can drive. Phonics-first works the same way. The child learns the mechanics of reading, and when he's through, he can read. Look and say works differently. The child is taught to read before he has learned the mechanics -- the sounds of the letters. It is like learning to drive by starting your car and driving ahead. . . . And the mechanics of driving? You would pick those up as you go along."

Rudolf Flesch,
Why Johnny Still Can't Read, 1981

Illiteracy in America is still growing at an alarming rate and that fact has not changed much since Rudolf Flesch wrote his best selling expose of reading instruction in 1955. Illiteracy continues to be a critical problem, demanding enormous resources from local, state, and federal taxes, while arguments about how to teach children to read continue to rage within the education research community, on Capitol Hill, in business, and in the classroom.

The International Reading Association estimates that more than one thousand research papers are prepared each year on the subject of literacy, and that is very likely a low figure. For the past 50 years, America's classrooms have been used by psychologists, sociologists, educationists, and politicians as a giant laboratory for unproven, untried theories of learning, resulting in a near collapse of public education. It is time we begin to move away from "what's new" and move toward "what works."

Here Are the Grim Statistics

- According to the National Adult Literacy Survey, 42 million adult Americans can't read; 50 million can recognize so few printed words they are limited to a 4th or 5th grade reading level;
- One out of every four teenagers drops out of high school, and of those who graduate, one out of every four has the equivalent or less of an eighth grade education.
- According to current estimates, the number of functionally illiterate adults is increasing by approximately two and one quarter million persons each year. This number includes nearly 1 million young people who drop out of school before graduation, 400,000 legal immigrants, 100,000 refugees, and 800,000 illegal immigrants, and 20 % of all high school graduates.
- Eighty-four percent of the 23,000 people who took an exam for entry-level jobs at New York Telephone in 1988, failed.
- More than half of Fortune 500 companies have become educators of last resort, with the cost of remedial employee training in the three R's reaching more than 300 million dollars a year.
- One estimate places the yearly cost in welfare programs and unemployment compensation due to illiteracy at six billion dollars. An additional 237 billion dollars a year in unrealized earnings is forfeited by persons who lack basic reading skills, according to Literacy Volunteers of America.
- The federal government alone has more than 79 literacy-related programs administered by 14 federal agencies.
- The total amount of money being spent on illiteracy by the federal government can only be guessed at, because there has never been a complete assessment prepared. A conservative estimate would place the amount at more than ten billion dollars each year, and growing steadily.

Why Does America Have A Reading Problem?

The question that must be asked is this: Why does America have a reading problem at all? We are the most affluent and technologically advanced of all the industrial nations on earth. We have "free" compulsory education for all, a network of state owned and operated teachers' colleges, strict teacher certification requirements, and more money and resources dedicated to educating our children than any other nation on earth.

Why Johnny Can't Read Provides an Answer

Rudolf Flesch, author of Why Johnny Can't Read wrote the following in a letter to his daughter in 1955, after teaching his grandson to read:

"Since I started to work with Johnny, I have looked into this whole reading business. I worked my way through a mountain of books and articles on the subject, I talked to dozens of people, and I spent many hours in classrooms, watching what was going on.

What I found is absolutely fantastic. The teaching of reading -- all over the United States, in all the schools, in all the textbooks -- is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense. Johnny couldn't read until half a year ago for the simple reason that nobody ever showed him how."

Time magazine called his book "the outstanding educational event of that year" and suggested that he represented "the devil in the flesch" to the education establishment.

There is an answer to "why Johnny can't read," but the answer is tough medicine to swallow. It requires education professionals, who for years have been engaged in a form of education malpractice, to admit that the methods of teaching reading they have vigorously advocated and staunchly defended ever since the 1930's are dead wrong.

If we are to seriously reverse the increasing number of illiterate adults in America and prevent the problem of illiteracy, we must swallow the medicine, as quickly as possible, and reject the instructional methods that have resulted in the widespread illiteracy we have today.

Everyone Can Be Taught To Read

Historically, all American school children were taught to read. Teachers never considered that a child "could not" be taught to read, and remedial reading was unheard of. In fact, the first remedial reading clinic opened in 1930, soon after the results of the "look and say" (the so called "Dick and Jane" program) reading methods were beginning to be felt.

Up until the early part of the 20th century, children were taught to read by first learning the alphabet, then the sounds of each letter, how they blended into syllables, and how those syllables made up words. They were taught that English spelling is logical and systematic, and that to become a fluent reader it was necessary to master the alphabetic "code" in which English words are written, to the point where it [the code] is used automatically with little conscious thought given to it.

Once a child learned the mechanics of the code, attention could be turned to more advanced content. It seldom, if ever, occurred to teachers to give children word lists to read, or to make beginning readers memorize whole words before learning the components of those words, or to memorize whole stories as today's proponents of the "whole language approach" recommend.

Several recent studies funded by the U.S. Department of Education, including Preventing Reading Failure: The Myths of Reading Instruction, found that 90 percent of remedial reading students today are not able to decode fluently, accurately, and at an automatic level of response. In a March, 1989, Phi Delta Kappan article, Harvard Professor Jeanne Chall (author of Learning to Read: The Great Debate) cites a study by Peter Freebody and Brian Byrne, that confirms the same finding. Today's students are not being taught the fundamental structure of language, but rather are engaged in what Dr. Kenneth Goodman (a proponent of "the whole language approach") has called a "psycholinguistic guessing game."

Two Ways to Teach Reading

One philosophy is usually called "whole language" but many other labels are, or have been used to describe it, such as: the whole-word method; language experience; psycholinguistics; look and say; reading recovery or integrated reading instruction. The "whole language" or "look and say" method teaches that children should memorize or "guess" at words in context by using initial letter or picture clues. According to estimates given in one widely used "look and say" reading series, a child taught this method should be able to recognize 349 words by the end of the first grade; 1,094 by the end of the second; 1,216 by the end of the third; and 1,554 by the end of the fourth grade. Learning to read this way is supposed to be more meaningful and fun. This way of teaching is currently used by nearly all of the schools in the United States. It is clear that the current high illiteracy rate is directly due to this scientifically invalidated approach to reading instruction.

Another approach is called intensive, systematic phonics first. With this technique, children are taught how to sound out and blend the letters that make up words in a specific sequence, from the simple to the complex. Today, educators call this method the "code" approach because it teaches the skills and logic children need to understand the English spelling system. When a child comes to school he/she has a spoken vocabulary of up to 24,000 words. Children taught to read using systematic phonics can usually read and understand at least as many words as they have in their spoken vocabulary by the end of the third grade.

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Will The Bureaucrats Ever Learn?

The Observer Staff

The May 1997 EDUCATION REPORTER says that Title I students have continued to trail behind their classmates. In fact, the gap has widened. The final report of a five-year, $29 million study has concluded that Title I, the federal government's largest K-12 education program, has failed to close the gap between low-achieving students and their peers. It is the largest longitudinal study conducted of Title I since its start in 1965. Title I costs taxpayers $7.2 billion per year.
It's also a proven fact that children, who are in early childhood development programs, are no further advanced in later years than those who did not attend these classes.

More than another $7 billion down a rat hole per year. Will the bureaucrats ever learn? Without a strong phonics program, these children will continue to fall behind. This brings us to HB 2701-A in the Oregon legislature which the House defeated by a 32-27 vote the end of May. They claim the law is unnecessary because teachers already use phonics. The bill was sponsored by Rep. Ron Sunseri (R-Gresham).

In September 1995, the INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY said that whole language was given a failing grade by a California task force assigned to evaluate whole language. Whole language, not intensive phonics, is being taught in Oregon government schools.

Some teachers attend the Riggs Institute in Beaverton, Oregon which concentrates heavily on teaching teachers how to teach intensive phonics. Comments from some in August 1988 were:
"There seems to be more organization to spelling in this method and it answers the 'why' questions. It gives a better understanding to letter combinations." -- Second Grade Milner Crest Teacher.

"I am really excited about beginning this program. It's the most useful class I've taken in a long time. Teacher ·cation colleges should be teaching this class. I wish I'd had it years ago!" -- 2nd grade Bunker Hill teacher

"...Last year we adopted (against strong opposition) a "look-say" basal. Many of us were extremely frustrated trying to teach the beginning reading skills..." -- 3rd grade Madison teacher "I am very anxious to get in my classroom and teach my students this method." -4th grade Charleston teacher.

"This course has unlocked the door for spelling for me... The Spalding method of phonics as taught by the Riggs Institute really unlocks the door for spelling, reading, writing and speech."--5th Grade Eastside Elementary teacher

Elected Officials Want Dumbed Down Kids - Easier To Control

It seems our elected officials really don't want answers to solve our educational problems which are turning out functional illiterates by the droves. They simply look for problems for which they can appropriate billions more in tax dollars.

Why is this you might ask? In the book, NEA-TROJAN HORSE (P. 106) Dewey's goal was to produce inferior readers with inferior intelligence dependent on a socialist educational elite for guidance, wisdom and control. Intensive phonics was the approach used prior to 1930 which gave us a highly literate population, probably the most literate in the world.

Johnny can't read because of the failure to teach first graders how to decode the English language with systematic phonics, says Phyllis Schlafly. And it is obvious that our Oregon legislators, who voted down Sunseri's phonics bill, simply are desirous of keeping our children from attaining the best they can be. It's a proven fact that the top-scoring schools teach intensive phonics because when it is taught correctly, children cannot help but learn.

There is more involved, however, than just keeping our children dumbed down. Expensive ·rkbooks would be unnecessary when phonics is taught. Follow the money! And think of all se workers within the prison system who would become unemployed. Illiteracy seems to be one of the biggest causes of people turning to crime.

What the Oregon legislature did on Sunseri's phonics legislation is educational malpractice and parents have absolutely no recourse except to pull their children from the public system and put

them in a school where int[redacted]ive phonics are taught in the ve[redacted]early years. But why should they have to pay taxes to support the public school system and also pay for private school tuition?

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The National Right to Read Foundation

A CENTURY OF MISEDUCATION IN READING

by
Robert W. Sweet, Jr.
1996

The literacy rate for adults who have been to school for at least six years will be less in the year 2000 than it was in 1900. We are fast becoming a nation divided between those who can read and those who cannot. Every day, somewhere in America, news headlines shout at us, "Illiteracy is increasing; our kids aren't being taught to read." How is it possible that a nation that prides itself on having the most educated population in the world can deny to its own children the ability to read?

We are spending almost a half trillion dollars on education at all levels,[1] and a third of a trillion of that tax money is being spent on elementary and secondary education. We are all being drawn into the vortex of the world wide web whether we like it or not. We are rushing to place a computer terminal in every classroom, and yet the simple concept of teaching our children the 26 letters of the alphabet, the 44 sounds those letters make, and the 70 common ways to spell them, is being rejected by the education elite, without regard to the overwhelming scientific evidence to the contrary.

Yes, we have had almost a century of education malpractice when it comes to teaching our children to read. We must apply some common sense and stop the academic child abuse that goes on under the guise of what today is called "whole language," and in the 1920's was called "look and say" reading instruction.

My purpose today is to explain why I believe illiteracy is rampant in America, but I offer a solution. It will not cost billions of dollars, and it will unlock the door for countless children, who would otherwise be left to aimlessly wander the corridors of beautiful school buildings, unable to read job notices on the bulletin boards.

Although statistics are always subject to challenge by some, the overwhelming evidence from such prestigious sources as the National Assessment of Education Progress,[2] (which found that "70 percent of fourth graders, 30 percent of eighth graders, and 64 percent of 12th graders did not... attain a proficient level of reading") cannot be ignored. These students have not attained the minimum skill level in reading considered necessary to do the academic work at their grade level. The National Adult Literacy Survey, after a five year study, confirmed that finding indicating that 42 million adults can't read, and that 50 million more recognize so few printed words they are limited to a 4th and 5th grade level of reading.[3]

Even more troubling are the findings of The Orton Dyslexia Society, that illiterate adults account for 75 percent of the unemployed, one third of the mothers receiving AFDC, 85 percent of the juveniles who appear in court, 60 percent of prison inmates, and nearly 40 percent of minority youth. Of people in the work force, 15 percent are functionally illiterate, including 11 percent of professional and managerial workers, and 30 percent of semiskilled and unskilled workers.[4] Is it any wonder that a Census Bureau survey released in February of this year found that "American employers regard the nation's educational system as an irrelevance?" Rather "businesses ignore a prospective employee's educational credentials in favor of work history and attitude."[5]

We must keep in mind that statistics represent real people, children and adults who often suffer the indignity and frustration of illiteracy alone. It is a quiet pain that only the illiterate can describe. Let me give you some real examples of what these statistics mean.

Demetrius Wilkins graduated from T.C. Williams High School in 1993. He was a model student, never a discipline problem. In fact if you had seen him on K street, here in the District of Columbia, you could have easily mistaken him for one of the up and coming young law clerks. He had near perfect attendance for his twelve years of schooling, and yet when he walked across the stage to accept his diploma from the smiling superintendent of schools, it was a sad day, because Demetrius couldn't even read it. The taxpayers had anteed up more than $100,000 for his schooling. And according to the U.S. Labor Department, this young man represents nearly 20 percent of high

school seniors graduating from o[redacted]chools today. But his story doesn't end [redacted]ere. After graduation he found a job in a meat packing plant. He lasted just a few days, because he couldn't read the labels on the meat. He tried desperately to find other employment, but because of his lack of reading skills, couldn't find a job. Finally, he was encouraged by some friends to go to a local adult reading clinic for help. He did so, and in a few weeks was reading for the first time in his life. According to the news reports, the only added ingredient he received was instruction in phonics, that is, mastering the letter/sound relationships he should have been taught in first grade.[6]

We cannot tolerate the kind of education malpractice this story represents any longer. It must stop now. Thousands of calls come to The National Right to Read Foundation, from parents whose children have been passed on grade after grade without being taught to read. The story is almost always the same. My child has been diagnosed by the school as having Attention Deficit Disorder, or dyslexia, or as being mentally retarded, or as having some other conduct disorder that places the blame on child or parent. And almost inevitably these children are in classes where "whole language" is used, and where almost no direct instruction in teaching phonics is present.

One more poignant story comes to mind that illustrates how painful illiteracy can be. At a meeting this spring, I commented that many parents tell us how depressed their children become when they are required to memorize little books without the ability to sound out new and unfamiliar words. Often the children express great frustration and anger when faced with the requirement of reading science, history, literature and math before they have learned to read with fluency and comprehension. A young lady sitting in the front row, jumped to her feet and almost shouted, "That's me! That's how I feel." "When the kids call you a retard, it makes you cry and it makes your heart hurt inside." This 14 year old girl, normal in every other way, had been placed in special education for seven of her years of schooling. No one had tried to find out if she just needed some direct instruction in phonics. There is a happy ending to this story. We were able to refer Bonnie Belle to a reading teacher who quickly diagnosed her reading skill deficit, and after just two sessions of direct phonics instruction, Bonnie Belle began to read and understand that there is a system. She is on her way to success. But what of the lost years of schooling? What of the frustration, pain, and lost self esteem she had experienced? Unfortunately, that cannot be repaid, or replaced. How tragic, how unnecessary, how outrageous.

This is the plight of thousands of young people all across America today. Shunted into special education classes, or Chapter I programs for disadvantaged youth, passed on year after year without ever mastering the basic skills essential for success in life. This reminds me of another story. Two teenage boys were fishing by a stream one day when they noticed someone floating downstream. They both jumped in, pulled the person out of the water, gave mouth-to mouth resuscitation, and saved his life. The next day, they were fishing in the same spot and noticed another person floating down the stream. Again, they jumped in and saved that person's life. From then on, people floating downstream happened quite consistently and many died en route to the hospital. The city council decided to build a hospital on that very spot so that they wouldn't have to transport the nearly drowned patients to the nearest hospital, which was eight miles away. The hospital became very busy and began to grow and expand. In fact the hospital became very well known across the country. Many interns came there to serve their residencies. One day, one of those interns approached the administrator and thanked him for the opportunity to do his internship with the hospital. "There is one thing that bothers me, though. Has anyone ever gone upstream to see why people are falling into the river?" "No," the administrator answered. "We just don't have time. We are too busy treating the victims."

Well, it's time we took a trip upstream!

For generations the educational pendulum has swung from one extreme to the other...teaching skills but with little reading of quality materials, or teaching literature without the skills necessary to actually read it. We know now, that doing one without the other dooms large numbers of our children to failure and closes the door to further learning.

Reading is the gateway skill; without the abilities necessary to read, our children will be unable to go through the gate to all other areas of learning; for they all depend on this one skill. From the time the first alphabet was invented some thirty five hundred years ago, learning to read consisted of learning letter/sound correspondences. Anyone of normal sight, hearing and intelligence, if taught properly, could learn to read their native language with relative ease. According to historian David Diringer, the invention of the alphabet is often said to be "the most important invention in the social history of the world. It was the creation of a revolutionary writing, a script which we can perhaps term democratic or the people's script."[7]

As Thomas Jefferson said: "A nation that is ignorant and free, is a nation that never was and never will be." Ignorance is only dispelled by a people who know how to read, and then read to know. It has just been within the past century that we have abandoned teaching of the body of knowledge we call phonics, to our children as a first

step in reading instruction. English is an alphabetic language. Its spelling system is at least 90 percent regular,[8] and by teaching children the 26 letters of the alphabet, the 44 sounds those letters represent, and the 70 most common ways to spell them, children can read nearly every word in English. This instruction can be done in a matter of months, and should be introduced in first grade at the latest.

Daniel Webster, one of America's great heros, said: "There is nothing so powerful as truth— and often nothing so strange." And the truth is this. We can solve illiteracy in America now. Poor people, rich people, rural residents and city dwellers, all have equal opportunity to master the skill of reading, if they are properly taught. The history of reading instruction from the inception of our nation, can be separated into three general eras, each one shorter than the one preceding. The first era runs from colonial times until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Then the process of reading instruction was simple and straightforward. "Teach the code, then have children read."[9] Learning the code unlocks at least 85 percent of the words in the English language.[10] It worked then; it will work now. Why did the system change? As the old saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" More about that later.

Noah Webster, who lived contemporaneously with Daniel, was probably the most influential American in the history of modern reading instruction. He published "An American Dictionary of the English Language" in 1806. It standardized English spelling, and that spelling system remains virtually the same today. Noah Webster published the famous New England Blue Backed Speller. For a century, more than 24 million copies were sold. It was second in sales only to the Bible.[11] Keep in mind that the population of America in 1800 was approximately 5 million people. By the early part of the twentieth century, the population had increased to over 100 million. Immigrants from every nation on earth had come to America. They all wanted to learn English, and most of them did. The Blue Backed Speller, as it was called, was the tool millions of Americans used to teach their children to read, whether at home or at school.

But influential educators, like Horace Mann of Massachusetts, and after him John Dewey of Columbia Teachers College, rejected the teaching of phonics. In the mid-1800's when Horace Mann was Secretary of Education for Massachusetts, he is quoted as saying: "...it is upon this emptiness, blankness, silence and death, that we compel children to fasten their eyes; the odor and fungeousness of spelling book paper; a soporific effluvium seems to emanate from the page, steeping all their faculties in lethargy."1[12] One does not need much imagination to sense Mann's disdain and disgust of "spelling books!" An interesting note here. Horace Mann's wife published an early "look and say" reader. It was based on the ideas of Thomas Galludet who was developing reading programs for the deaf. One of the first lines in her early reader was this: "Frank had a dog, his name was Spot."[13] Well, I am sure Spot never dreamed how famous he would become.

The second era, began at the turn of the twentieth century, and lasted until the late 1960's, as Horace Mann's philosophy of reading instruction, aided and abetted by the spread of the Normal School for training teachers, firmly entrenched the "look and say" teaching of reading. For example, the early "look and say" primers were published by Scott Foresman in 1914. The basic premise was, teach the children to memorize the most commonly used words in the English language, adding new words each year and reaching a total of about 1500 words by the end of 4th grade.[14]

In the 1930's other publishers, seeing great profitability in selling "look and say" readers, jumped on the band wagon. Thus the rejection of phonics as the first step in teaching reading started the slow, but inevitable death of phonics. By the 1950's illiteracy rates were steadily rising, and parents of students who couldn't read were told their children needed "remedial" help. In 1955, Rudolph Flesch, another great American hero, sounded the alarm in his classic book, "Why Johnny Can't Read." In a follow up volume, Why Johnny Still Can't Read published in 1981, he reaffirmed the problem and the solution once again. And his solution was simple. "The truth is, of course, that any normal six-year-old loves to learn letters and sounds. He is fascinated by them. They are the greatest thing he has come up against in life."[15] Teach those principles directly and systematically, and you will have life long readers who love books. But his admonition fell on deaf ears. In two unpublished letters to a friend, Dr. Flesch describes his frustration: The first was written in 1955, shortly after his first book was released. "My Editor at Harpers, Mr. George Jones, can't get over his amazement at seeing a whole profession coming down on one poor little guy who wrote a book. He just didn't know what you and I know, namely, the enormous scandal of this whole thing, and the burning desperation of millions of parents." In 1986, just a few days before he died, Dr. Flesch wrote another letter to the same friend: "Dear John, When will all this lunacy end? It's over 50 years and it's going on and on. Pity the poor children. Pity the poor country - misguided, mistaught, defrauded from the first day of school. With all best wishes, Rudi."[16]

The third era began in the early 1970's and continues today. This "new" reading philosophy was called "whole language." In fact it was a more radical version of the "look and say" approach so popular in the early part of the century. "Whole language" relies on whole word memorization, but the words memorized are whatever happens to n the "authentic literature books" the children are required to "read." "Whole language" theorists believe that children learn to read just the same way they learn to speak. Medical and linguistic research have conclusively refuted such a notion,[17] but "whole language" advocates ignore such research because it upsets their theory of learning. They continue to believe that we are born with the ability to read, and all that is required is to surround children with books, reading to them and watching them become readers by osmosis.

With whole language, no longer were the most commonly used words memorized, as was the case with the "look and say" readers. Despite the inane stories of Dick and Jane, Spot and Puff, we all learned to memorize certain words that made it possible to function quite well. But many of us who were victims of Dick and Jane attest to being poor spellers, and many others don't really enjoy reading. "Whole language" took us to new heights (or depths) of illiteracy because memorization of difficult words like forsythia in first grade is virtually impossible for a large percentage of students. Parents became frustrated, angry and felt guilty thinking they were the reason their otherwise normal children couldn't read. In fact, the real reason was the refusal or inability of teachers to instruct their first grade students in how the alphabetic code works.

Today, we are in the midst of a revolution. It is one of the most crucial of this century. It doesn't hit the mainstream media very often, and yet the outcome of this revolution will spell success or defeat for welfare reform, reducing delinquency, improving our competitive edge among the industrial nations of the world, and very likely the survival of our Republic. If the solution is so simple, then why isn't it implemented now? That is a fair question, and it deserves an answer. There are ten reasons why I believe the education system which perpetuates illiteracy is almost impossible to change. Here they are:[18]

1. The public education monopoly is not held accountable for results;
2. There is an interlocking protective network, of teacher educators, teacher organizations and their publications, state and federal departments of education, school officials and publishers of school textbooks, that is exceedingly difficult for outside criticism to penetrate;
3. There is general agreement, with few exceptions, within this network that direct and systematic teaching of reading is ineffective, harmful and an insult to learners' self esteem, dignity and freedom;
4. There is general ignorance about what experimental research has proven to be the benefits of teaching direct. systematic phonics;
5. There are many in the network who consider systematic teaching of phonics information as a "conservative political plot." There is abhorrence among many in the network for any teaching seen as "traditional;"
6. There continues to be a lack of utilization of the findings of experimental research, which overwhelmingly supports direct, systematic phonics;
7. There is a denial among those in the network that there is a crisis of illiteracy in America;
8. There has been no easy nor regular accommodation from the courts for grievances over malpractice in reading instruction;
9. The monopoly over teacher education allows reading teachers to be wrongly trained with impunity.

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Phonics and Whole Language

The way American schools teach children to read and write has, for many years now, been under the divergent influences of two powerful schools of thought. Conventional curricula still reflect a time-honored reliance on phonics and basal readers, but a "whole-language" approach has been embraced by many educators.

In fact, the whole-language approach has become so dominant in certain areas that it has sparked a powerful pro-phonics backlash. Many experts hope the current debate will ultimately lead to a healthy balance between the two approaches, blending the best of the new methods with the best of the old.

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The traditional theory of learning, which became institutionalized with the beginning of mass schooling in the 19th century, is that children learn a complex skill like reading by first making sense of the smallest components of the language (letters) and then progressing to larger components (sounds, words, and sentences). Children learn to read by learning to decode the language; understanding follows after they break the code and master the components.

Traditional American education, therefore, begins with reading lessons that focus on phonics (sounding out first letters, then combinations of letters), tightl controlled vocabulary, and short "basal" (or basic) reading passages, followed by numerous exercises, each with only one correct answer.

If phonics is all about sounding out, whole language is all about figuring out.

"Whole language" represents a different philosophy about learning, and the role of language in the classroom. It stre children should use language in ways that relate to their ov and cultures. In the whole-language classroom, the final product--the "answer"-- isn't as important as the process. are encouraged to decode words by their context. Whole-l advocates point out that the average 1st grader has already a vocabulary of ten thousand words and assimilated many rules of grammar without formal schooling.

The common techniques of whole-language teaching--daily journal and letter writing, a grea silent and oral reading of real literature, and student cooperation, to name a few--represent th philosophy in action.

The rise of the whole-language approach has been so dramatic that some teachers complain t can't even find basal readers anymore. In addition, many new teachers say their instructors : of education no longer teach them how to teach phonics, just mentioning it in passing.

Advocates of whole language insist that it is not the death of phonics, which remains an important tool in the toolbox. But there is clearly a difference in priorities. Critics feel that whole language overemphasizes "understanding," at the expense of accuracy and correctness. A 1st grader in a whole-language classroom could come home with an essay full of "invented" spelling and fractured grammar--having receiv from a teacher impressed with the thoughts expressed and the overall use of language. Son feel that sort of laxity will lead to a generation of students who never learn how to spell pr Advocates of the whole-language approach, by contrast, say that an overemphasis on rules learning has proven time and again to be stifling--and leads children to see reading and wri arduous and arcane chores, rather than as an interesting way of gathering information.

Maybe there's middle ground

Which philosophy of instruction will win out? Research strongly indicates that students wil most successful if a balanced approach is used: Teach phonics in a systematic fashion, with context of real stories. One indication that this may be the wave of the future: Some publish beginning to produce textbooks that fill the bill.

Glossary Terms

- basal readers
- basic skills
- curriculum
- illiteracy
- standards

From Education Week's Archives

"A War of Words: Whole Language Under Siege," Karen Diegmueller, March 20, 199 Teachers react to recent trends that mandate schools to include direct instructio. (i.e., phon reading. With sidebars:

- "The Best of Both Worlds," Mounting empirical research strongly suggests that m children need explicit phonics instruction, leading experts to believe that a combina phonics and whole language may be the most effective way to teach the beginning
- "A Delicate Balance," At Fairland Elementary School in Maryland, 1st-grade teache Grenon blends the elements of whole-language instruction with the basic skills that many experts believe beginning readers need.

"Effectiveness of Clinton Reading Plan Questioned," Feb. 26, 1997. Many educators quest prospects for success of President Clinton's plan to stamp out the reading problems of U.S

"Calif. Text Adoption Puts Emphasis on Phonics," Jan. 15, 1997. The state school board h off its effort to improve achievement with a renewed emphasis on phonics in the nation's la textbook adoption for English-language arts.

"The Decline of Literacy," J. Martin Rochester, May 15, 1996. Commentary: A college pro attributes inferior literacy of today's college freshmen to overall lowered standards, a de-em accuracy in writing, and a watered-down delivery of literature in language arts education.

"Standards for Language Arts Are Unveiled," Karen Diegmueller, March 20, 1996. Report document released by NCTE and IRA, a draft of the much talked-about English standards.

"Learning English-Language Arts," March 20, 1996. A list of voluntary national standards by National Council of Teachers of English and Independent Reading Association for heigh literacy among school-aged children.

On the Web

The Great Debate Revisited. Art Levine, in *The Atlantic Monthly* , December 1994. Conten between proponents of the "meaning first" and the "phonics first" approaches to literacy goe more than a century. That the former is now in the ascendant, the author argues, should be concern.

English: What Students Need To Learn. Created by Teachers College, Columbia University parent-friendly guide gives some basic goals for any student of English and ways that paren help reinforce learning in the home.

The Whole Language FAQ: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions. Answers to question "What are good books to read on whole language?" are answered by subscribers to the Tea Applying Whole Language Discussion List, an online mailing li

1994 Reading Report Card. A status report from the National Assessment of Educational P Among its findings: The average reading proficiency of 12th grade students declined signifi from 1992 to 1994.

Background Reading

- *The Art of Teaching Writing* , Lucy McCormick Calkins, Heinemann Press, 1994 toward middle school teachers and details Calkins' development of the student-cen "writing workshop."
- *Clearing the Way* , Tom Romano, Heinemann Press, 1987. Same school of thoug Calkins. Targeted to secondary teachers with lesson ideas and supportive theory.
- *Emergent and Developing Reading: Messages for Teachers* , Pamela Owen and Pe Dumfrey, eds., 1995. Provides an international perspective on how children learn
- *The Future of Whole Language: Reconstruction or Self-Destruction* , Susan Chur Argues that teachers and parents need to take an active and critical view of efforts i curriculum (particularly language arts) reform.
- *The Literacy Dictionary: The Vocabulary of Reading and Writing* , Theodore L. H Richard E. Hodges, eds., International Reading Association, 1995. A reference to changing terminology of language arts pedagogy.
- *Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to* . Smith, Frank, L. Erbaum, publisher, 1994. Psycholinguistic theory on how child read by one of the leading educators in support of whole-language instruction.

Related Organizations

International Reading Association
National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy
National Council of Teachers of English
National Writing Project
Writing Lab

The National Right to Read Foundation

HONICS LEGISLATION AND STATE REGULATION APPROVED IN 1996.

OHIO SB 230 (1996) [Excerpt]

Section 3319.24 As used in this section: (1) "coursework in the teaching of reading" means coursework that includes training in a range of instructional strategies for teaching reading, in the assessment of reading skills, and in the diagnosis and remediation of reading difficulties; (2) "phonics" means a through, exact, concentrated, sequential system for teaching children to read or enunciate by learning the usual sounds of the alphabet's letters and the blending of the sounds. Phonics always includes the techniques or practices used to teach children to match letters of the alphabet with the specific sounds they represent. Such techniques and practices are introduced incrementally, logically and systematically, and then thoroughly practiced as the child is trained to translate those written sound symbols into the exact written and spoken language those symbols represent so that the child can read and spell.

Note: There was an emergency conference committee meeting called to deal with the "definition of phonics." The Ohio Council of Teachers of English & Language Arts "had a problem with the explicit definition of phonics in the House Bill." The above definition may have been changed in the final legislation, but we recommend other states model what was agreed to in the first conference committee report. For more information call: Judi Hahn (513) 232-5625.

LIFORNIA AB 170 (1996) [Excerpt]

Section 1. Section 60200.4 is added to the Education Code, to read: instruction materials that it adopts for mathematics and reading in grades 1-8, inclusive, are based on the fundamental skills required by these subjects, including, but not limited to, systematic, explicit phonics, spelling, and basic computational skills.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature that the fundamental skills of all subject areas, including systematic, explicit phonics, spelling, and basic computational skills, be included in the adopted curriculum frameworks and that these skills and related tasks increase in depth and complexity from year to year. It is the intent of the Legislature that the instructional materials adopted by the State Board of Education meet the provisions of this section. For more information call: Assemblyman Steve Baldwin (916) 445-3266.

California Reading Program Advisory (1996) [Excerpt]

Systematic, Explicit Phonics--This term refers to an organized program where letter-sound correspondences for letters and letter clusters are directly taught; blended; practiced in words, word lists, and word families; and practiced initially in text with a high percentage of decodable words linked to the phonics lesson. Teachers should provide prompt and explicit feedback.

In reading for meaning, skillful readers move their eyes through text left to right, line by line, and word by word. With the exception of short function words, such as a, on, of, and any, they almost never skip or guess. Instead, they fixate on very nearly each and every word of text. Further during the fraction of a second that they do so, they take in-- and must take in--all of its letters, translating them to speech sounds on their way to evoking the word's meaning.

These word recognition processes are far too rapid and automatic for skillful readers to be aware of them. Nevertheless, their reality has been broadly confirmed through a variety of technologically sophisticated research methods with mature readers, including eye-movement recordings and brain-imaging techniques. In terms of

instruction, these findings carry a critical implication. To become skillful readers, children must learn how to decode words instantly and effortlessly. It is for this reason that children must be taught initially to examine the letters and letter patterns of every new word while reading.

ilarly, while practicing phonetic decoding, children must not be taught to skip new words or guess their meaning. While the interpretation of text depends integrally on context, the recognition of its words should not. Research reveals that only poor and disabled readers rely on context for word identification (Stanovich, 1980). Conversely, poorly developed knowledge of spellings and spelling-sound correspondences is found to be the most frequent, debilitating, and pervasive cause of reading difficulty (Bruck, 1990; Perfette, 1985; Rack, Snowling, & Olson, 1992; Vellutino, 1991). Young readers must develop fast, accurate decoding skills; and research verifies that they are much more likely to do so if they receive a good programs of phonics instruction.

The role of effective phonics instruction is to help children understand, apply, and learn the alphabetic principle and conventions of written language. . . . The most effective phonics instruction is explicit--that is, taking care to clarify key points and principles for students. In addition, it is systematic--that is, it gradually builds from basic elements to more subtle and complex patterns. The goal is to convey the logic of the system and to invite its extension to new words that the children will encounter on their own. For more information call: Dianne Levin (916) 657-5236.

NORTH CAROLINA (Chapter 716, Senate Bill 1139) (1996) [Exerpt]

Section 8.1. The State Board of Education shall develop a comprehensive plan to improve reading achievement in the public schools. The plan shall be fully intergrated with State Board plans to improve student performance and promote local flexibility and efficiency. The plan shall be based on reading instructional practices for which there is strong evidence of effectiveness in existing empirical scientific research studies on reading development.

Section 8.2. . . . The General Assembly believes that the first, essential step in the complex process of learning to read is the accurate pronunciation of written words and that phonics, which is the knowledge of relationships of the symbols of the written language and the sounds of the spoken language, is the most reliable approach to arriving at accurate pronunciation of a printed word. Therefore, these programs shall include early and systematic phonics instruction.

Section 8.3. . . . In order to reflect changes to the standard course of study and to emphasize balanced, integrated, and effective programs of reading instruction that include early and systematic phonics instruction, the State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Board of Governors of The University of North Carolina and with the North Carolina Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, shall review, evaluate, and revise current teacher certification standards and teacher education programs within the institutions of higher education that provide coursework in reading instruction.

Section 8.4. Local boards of education are encouraged to review and revise existing board policies, local curricula, and programs of professional development in order to reflect changes to the standard course of study and to emphasize balanced, integrated, and effective programs of reading instruction that include early and systematic phonics instruction. For more information call: Representative Mike Decker (910) 595-3005.

WISCONSIN (AB 237) (1996)

Section 1.118.19 (11) of the statutes is created to read: Beginning on July 1, 1998, the state superintendent may not issue or renew a license that authorizes the holder to teach reading or language arts to pupils in any prekindergarten class or in any of the grades from kindergarten to 6 unless the applicant has successfully completed instruction preparing the applicant to teach reading and language arts using phonics. The instruction need not be provided as a separate course. In this subsection, "phonics" means a method of teaching beginners to read and pronounce words by learning the phonetic value of letters, letter groups and syllables. For more information call: Representative Glenn Grothman (608) 264-8486.

WASHINGTON (HB 2909) (1996)

New Section. Section 1. A new section is added to chapter 28A.300 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The center for the improvement of student learning, or its designee, shall develop and implement a process for identifying programs that have been proven to be effective using scientifically valid research in teaching elementary students to read. The identification process shall be designed to be ongoing until December 31, 2000, and shall allow additional programs to be reviewed after the initial identification of programs.

(2) In identifying effective reading programs, the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning, or its designee, shall consult primary education teachers, state-wide reading organizations, institutions of higher education, the commission on student learning, parents, legislators, and other appropriate individuals and organizations.

(3) In identifying effective reading programs, the following criteria shall be used: (a) whether the program has achieved documented results for students on valid and reliable assessments; (b) whether the results of the program have been replicated at different locations over a period of time; (c) whether the requirements and specifications for implementing the program are clear so that potential users can clearly determine the requirements of the program and how to implement it; (d) whether, when considering the cost of implementing the program, the program is cost-effective relative to other similar types of programs; (e) whether the program addresses differing student populations; and other appropriate criteria and considerations.

(4) The initial identification of effective reading programs shall be completed and a list of the identified programs prepared by December 15, 1996. For more information call: Representative Peggy Johnson (360) 786-7966.

TEXAS (Houston Independent School District - the Nation's 7th largest) PEER Report, co-chaired by former First Lady Barbara Bush and Dr. Barbara Foorman, University of Houston. (1996)

". . . the more explicit the instruction in phonics, the greater the growth and outcomes in reading. Specifically, even though children started the school year at the same low levels of phonological and word reading skills, by the end of year the children receiving direct instruction with synthetic phonics were at the 44th percentile, and children receiving a whole language approach were at the 27th percentile (if the teachers were trained by the researchers) or at the 17th percentile (if the teachers were trained by the district). It is significant that direct instruction brought economically disadvantaged, low achieving first-and second graders close to the national average in reading, whereas whole language instruction placed students near the 25th percentile. Children scoring below the 25th percentile are often identified as reading disabled under traditional diagnostic criteria. This, one concludes that many children are disabled by lack of exposure to explicit instruction in the alphabetic principle.

PEER Committee recommendations include the following:

Direct, systematic instruction in phonemic and phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge in kindergarten and first grade.

Direct, systematic instruction in the alphabetic code and blending in Grade 1, where the opportunity to master the principle taught is maximized by the use of: a) controlled vocabulary text, and b) oral reading to allow the teacher to judge each student's decoding automaticity and fluency.

Direct, systematic instruction in regular spelling patterns in Grade 1; exceptional patterns, morphology, and writing conventions in Grade 2 and beyond.

For more information call: PEER Committee Member Jimmy Kilpatrick (713) 520-9715.

This information has been prepared by
THE NATIONAL RIGHT TO READ FOUNDATION
Tel: 800-468-8911

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A battle over the ABCs

2-15-98 Seattle Times/pE

BARRY WONG / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Seated so they can hear each other, *first-graders Jonathan Pearl, left, and Joshua Marasoff take turns reading a book aloud at Garfield Elementary School in Everett. Students, placed in groups by ability, rather than grade level, are tested every eight weeks and moved to new classes as they progress.*

A new conflict has opened in the political war over education, with state lawmakers debating how reading skills are taught. At the same time, schools are trying a mix of methods to get kids reading.

TIMES FOCUS — EDUCATION

By Jolaine Houts and Debbie Seaquist
Seattle Times staff reporters

Reading time is inviolable at Garfield Elementary in Everett. It's only a slight exaggeration to say it would take Mother Nature or an act of God to disrupt the 90-minute period devoted to reading every morning.

There are no field trips or assemblies. No announcements, phone calls or earthquake drills. Doctor's appointments are frowned upon.

While the focus is single-minded, the instruction isn't.

Kids in one class hold their hands in front of their mouths to feel the air forced out when they make the sound represented by the letters "sp" — spuh.

In another, they're creating a list of words with the letters "aw." More-advanced students work in teams answering questions about a story they've read.

And it's working: 81 percent of those who started the year at Garfield are reading at their grade levels now, up from 67 percent when the school year began.

"I checked and rechecked those numbers. I thought surely I'd made a mistake," said Jan Weakley, the school's reading facilitator.

What's happening at Garfield reflects several truths about reading in Puget Sound-area schools: Phonics is alive and well in the classroom. Schools are focusing on reading in a new and intensive way. And variety is key — there's no one way to teach that's guaranteed to reach every kid.

But reading has also become the new front in a partisan war over education, a battle of bombast in which participants lob the words "phonics" and "whole language" as code for conservative or liberal extremism.

PLEASE SEE *Reading* ON A 12

Inside

keys for successful reading programs. A 12

Tomorrow

- *How should teachers be trained to teach reading? Legislators have ideas.*
- *How the phonics battle has affected the Snohomish School District.*

Speech and language pathologist Loren Betton *uses a puppet named Alfie to introduce new sounds to Garfield first- and second-graders.*

Phonics: We looked! Then we saw him step in on the mat! We looked! And we saw him! The Cat in the Hat! And he said to us, "Why do you sit there like that?"

Phonics teaches students to decode words by sounding out individual letters and syllables. Young readers are taught to tie sounds to letters, then break an unfamiliar word down into its individual sounds, and finally blend the sounds together again into a word.

The Dr. Seuss book "The Cat in the Hat" is a typical phonics primer. The words are generally easy to sound out, use predictable letter-sound combinations and emphasize patterns and rhymes.

At Thurgood Marshall Elementary School in South Seattle, teacher Noel Horcasitas drills kindergartners in phonics in the DISTAR program.

READING
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

A battle over the ABCs

"State Rep. Marlin Appelwick, D-Seattle, for example, suggested to reporters recently that the push for phonics in the state Legislature is an attempt by conservatives to funnel money out of public schools and into private religious schools.

On the other side, an Everett teacher evoked cheers and gasps from the audience at a recent legislative hearing by saying proudly: "I'm a Democrat, and I still support phonics."

Lawmakers pushing phonics

The main battlefield this legislative session is HB-2419, introduced by state Rep. Peggy Johnson, R-Shelton. It is widely assumed the bill will pass the House this week and move to the Senate.

The bill would establish resource centers where teachers could find information about phonics-based reading programs, and set up a volunteer tutor system to help struggling readers in the classroom.

But the aspect of the bill that's causing the most furor among teachers — and that's dearest to Johnson's heart — is a section saying that if schools want state funds to help improve their reading test scores, they must commit to using phonics-based training, which she believes will fix mistakes of the past.

Even some opponents of Johnson's bill reluctantly acknowledge there were excesses during the years when the whole-language approach was widely popular — classrooms that ignored phonics in their zeal for literature, students who moved from grade to grade without ever really learning to read. "" New research on the brain, new public scrutiny of reading test scores and the weight of a conservative political agenda all have contributed to a resurging interest in

teacher, doesn't believe educators when they say they're already teaching phonics, or teaching it the best way.

"There are many schools where teachers haven't had the training to do phonics properly, and there are many schools who are yet committed to doing only whole language and not doing systematic phonics," she said.

Johnson admits she doesn't know exactly how many schools might be teaching it poorly or not at all, but "we see the low test scores and know."

There's a right way to do phonics, Johnson said: "Direct systematic instruction," when teachers explain the 26 letters and 44 sounds "and give them rules upfront so they can decode the squiggly marks on the page."

There's a wrong way, too, that teachers still use, she said. That's more of a phonics-as-you-go method where teachers interrupt reading when they come across certain letters or sounds, then explain the rules, instead of giving children the rules upfront.

But Johnson has been sensitive to the outcry about a phonics mandate. "Whole language and phonics are important," she said during a hearing on her bill last month. "I am not one of those one-size-fits-all people."

Still, she has rankled educators by refusing to delete portions of her bill that would limit to phonics training the assistance that schools requesting help from the state could receive. Both Gov. Gary Locke and Terry Bergeson, the state superintendent of public instruction, believe that while phonics is an important part of reading instruction, the decision about reading programs should be made by individual districts and schools, not politicians.

Bergeson said she and Johnson aren't so far apart in their views about how to boost reading achievement. "We both want every kid to be a reader. I also want them to be thoughtful readers," she said.

Teaching trends emerging

Dozens of interviews with district and school officials and classroom visits to a half-dozen schools from Everett to Kent provided an up-close look at what schools are doing about reading. Several trends emerged:

- Virtually all schools devote some time to phonics, most intensely in kindergarten, first and second grades. In a December survey by the Washington Association of School Administrators, 91 percent of school districts statewide said they included phonics as an integral part of their reading programs. But the amount of time and the way phonics is taught vary widely.
- More than one reading program or curriculum is used. Some schools have created their own programs, while others have bought packaged reading programs from commercial vendors. Particularly popular here are Accelerated Reader, Reading Recovery, and Success For All, the program in use at Garfield Elementary in Everett.

Ironically, a bill Johnson sponsored in 1997 targeting beginning reading instruction may have done just what she's trying to achieve with her phonics bill. *Many* schools used grant money attached to that bill to try out research-based programs with a strong emphasis on phonics.

- Educators are talking a lot about reading and rethinking how they approach it — and were doing so before lawmakers started talking about phonics most recently.

Garfield drew more than 150 visitors last year, most of them teachers and principals wondering if such a program would work in their schools. A training session on reading in the Lake Washington School District drew three times as many teachers as organizers anticipated. A session on reading at a recent statewide education-reform conference was "jammed to the gills," Bergeson said. "People were hanging off the rafters."

- While schools strive for a balanced approach, there's surprisingly little agreement on the details of what that means. Should a good reading program include small-group instruction, or instruction to the whole class? Do workabeets have a place or not? Should small groups be divided by reading levels, or should those groups have both good and poor readers? When introducing the alphabet, should a teacher have a letter-of-the-week approach, or is that too rigid?

This much is decided: The question is no longer whether to teach phonics, but how — and how much.

The shift to whole language

Washington is no California.

This state never went whole hog to whole language, as critics say was true in California, where reading test scores plummeted and where the state has recently begun back-pedaling.

But whole language has been popular here, a movement that began in the 1980s as a backlash against the kind of strict phonics lessons popular in the '70s that teachers — who call a rigid phonics approach the drill-and-kill method — feared were numbing children.

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New research on the brain, new public scrutiny of reading test scores and the weight of a conservative political agenda all have contributed to a resurging interest in teaching young readers the basic building blocks of reading.

In the elementary classrooms in this area, however, a phonics mandate imposed by the Legislature is about as popular as the notion of a teacher pay cut. Some teachers say they feel nervous: If lawmakers start dictating how to teach reading, what next? Others are furious and say the phonics backers don't understand how complex the act of reading is.

"What if we told doctors you can only treat cancer with radiation? This is the same thing," said Linda Sugimoto Tipps, a Bellevue teacher and president of the Washington Organization for Reading Development, a statewide group of 2,700 reading teachers and administrators.

Striking a balance

Those who actually teach kids to read say they barely recognize what they do in the cartoonish portrayal they hear coming from Olympia. Educators say the choice between whole language and phonics isn't an either-or formula, and the best teachers have always taught phonics, even when they had to be a little sly about it. One approach does not — and should not — exclude the other.

Schools like Garfield are the rule, not the exception, they say. They strike a careful balance in their reading programs, consciously teaching the decoding skills of phonics and the comprehension skills associated with whole language.

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Springing in part from teachers' colleges, the whole-language movement is more of a philosophy than a reading program. It preaches engaging students with good literature, emphasizing comprehension skills and using pictures and other context clues to figure out what words mean. Students learn to read by seeing words in use, rather than by sounding them out, this philosophy goes.

Supporters say good practitioners of whole language also include instruction in phonics, how to sound out individual letters and syllables and blend them back together into words. But education is prone to fads — Bergeson calls it the "it's-new-it's-cool" tendency — and in many cases, phonics has gotten short shrift or been dropped altogether.

Sometimes, those who still taught phonics felt compelled to keep it quiet. A 20-year teaching veteran at Sanislo Elementary in West Seattle recalls going to workshops in the '80s and feeling she couldn't mention she was still teaching phonics. Others felt they had to be secretive even in their own schools. If the principal walked in while they were teaching phonics, they'd switch to something else.

Whole language swept the textbook-publishing industry, too, and some districts had a hard time finding materials to help them teach phonics.

The pendulum has clearly swung. Today, most district reading standards, as well as

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

BARRY WONG / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Sanislo Elementary School *in West Seattle pairs older students with younger ones in the Reading Buddies program. Here, fifth-grader Bych Le To, left, takes turns reading a book with third-grader Maricel Garcia.*

Nine keys to success

Reading has become one of the most intensely researched areas in education. Some of that research has trickled out, slowly, to classroom teachers. But a good reading program seems to be at least as much common-sense as it is science. The best schools tend to have many of these nine elements in common:

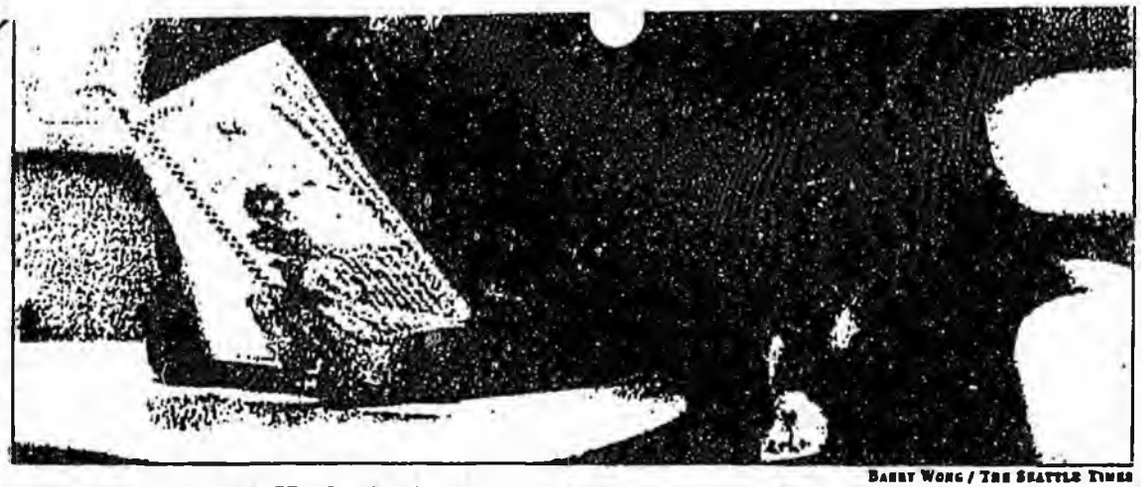
thing," said L Sugimoto Tipps, a Bellevue teacher and president of the Washington Organization for Reading Development, a statewide group of 2,700 reading teachers and administrators.

Striking a balance

Those who actually teach kids to read say they barely recognize what they do in the cartoonish portrayal they hear coming from Olympia. Educators say the choice between whole language and phonics isn't an either-or formula, and the best teachers have always taught phonics, even when they had to be a little sly about it. One approach does not — and should not — exclude the other.

Schools like Garfield are the rule, not the exception, they say. They strike a careful balance in their reading programs, consciously teaching the decoding skills of phonics and the comprehension skills associated with whole language.

Johnson, herself a former substitute



BARRY WONG / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Sanislo Elementary School *in West Seattle pairs older students with younger ones in the Reading Buddies program. Here, fifth-grader Bych La To, left, takes turns reading a book with third-grader Maricel Garcia.*

how to sound out individual lett 1 syllables and blend them back together into words. But education is prone to fads — Bergeson calls it the "if-it's-new-it's-cool" tendency — and in many cases, phonics has gotten short shrift or been dropped altogether.

Sometimes, those who still taught phonics felt compelled to keep it quiet. A 20-year teaching veteran at Sanislo Elementary in West Seattle recalls going to workshops in the '80s and feeling she couldn't mention she was still teaching phonics. Others felt they had to be secretive even in their own schools. If the principal walked in while they were teaching phonics, they'd switch to something else.

Whole language swept the textbook-publishing industry, too, and some districts had a hard time finding materials to help them teach phonics.

The pendulum has clearly swung. Today, most district reading standards, as well as

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Nine keys to success

Reading has become one of the most intensely researched areas in education. Some of that research has trickled out, slowly, to classroom teachers. But a good reading program seems to be at least as much common sense as it is science. The best schools tend to have many of these nine elements in common:

1 Phonemic awareness

An emerging area of research nationally that, until recently, has gotten little attention in the classroom, this means the ability to hear the individual sounds that make up words: *tuh-ar-es* becomes *tree*. Children who can't hear those separate sounds are likely to have trouble when it's time to decipher written words.

Spruce Primary School in Lynnwood has always considered itself a whole-language school, but for teachers, that's always meant they paid attention to phonics, too. This year they've added a new program called Open Court to teach phonemic awareness in kindergarten.

Kindergarten teacher Jackie Wells has a frog puppet on each hand to introduce a new sound to her 16 students: the 'o' that sounds like 'ah.' She reads a story about Bob the Frog, and has one puppet use a tongue depressor to examine the throat of the other frog. "What does the frog say?" she asks.

"Ah, ah, ah," the kids reply. They take turns drawing letters out of a brown bag to create words with the ah sound. Mop, pot, sock.

"Some grasp reading by learning the parts, others need to start with the whole," said Principal Lynda Tripp in explaining her school's eclectic approach. "We twist and we turn to accommodate them."

2 Phonics

While there's broad agreement now on the value of teaching letter-sound relationships, how phonics is taught varies widely. Some break phonics into mini-lessons embedded in reading instruction that also teaches comprehension and other reading skills.

Others highlight the "decoding" skills of phonics.

Thurgood Marshall Elementary in South Seattle has been using the controversial DISTAR (Direct Instruction System for Teaching And Remediation) program in kindergarten and first grade since 1991, but last year, Principal Ed Jefferson looked at the school's flagging test scores and decided to go schoolwide.

That decision cost him a half-dozen teachers, who objected to the highly scripted phonics program and quit. Jefferson isn't apologizing.

"It would be educational malpractice if I continued with something that wasn't working," he said. "When I would ask teachers how they taught reading, some couldn't answer, or I got different answers. . . . This brings a certain order to the classroom."

Children are tested every five to 10 lessons and assigned to groups based on their skill level.

In Ernestine Tinner's kindergarten room, a small group is reading a simple story, touching each word as they say it aloud: He. Ate. A. Fig. Tinner claps out each word. She asks them to predict what they'll see in the picture once they flip over their worksheets. That's the opposite of what a whole-language program would encourage — using the picture to help understand what the words mean.

Kindergartners have to reach Lesson 40 before they're assigned their first readers.

Critics say DISTAR's linear approach relies on mindless drills and boring stories that may artificially boost test scores in the short term, but doesn't show students how to understand or enjoy what they read.

But Tinner says it works. "I have noticed first- and second-graders coming back (to the kindergarten level) to learn the basics. . . . I have seen the results, the pride when they first learn to read. Even their behavior changes," she said. "These kids are not bored. No way."

Whole-language practices — kids reading to each other, teachers reading a story, kids choosing their own books — might work for some schools, Jefferson said, "but, darn it, unless they have the basic skills to know how to read that book they choose . . . How can it be child-centered when a child can't spell cat? I just don't get it."

3 Good literature

Even those who bash the whole-language movement tend to agree it contributed new understanding about how interesting stories with richly drawn illustrations can hook young readers.

At North Hill Primary School in the Highline School District, young students study everything from ancient Egypt to Greek mythology as part of the school's "Core Knowledge" curriculum, designed to expose children to global issues and world history at a very young age.

Last month, second-graders decorated classrooms with Chinese lanterns and read simple books about China to study Chinese New Year. While the curriculum is not a reading program, it is designed to whet the learning appetites of young children and make them want to read more.

4 Comprehension

Many teachers say this is the most important skill they teach. They envision phonics and decoding instruction tucked into a larger program that teaches children how to evaluate, interpret and analyze what they read. Kids shouldn't just learn to read, they say; they should also read to learn.

At Sanislo Elementary School in West Seattle, Principal Karen Ho'o said students shouldn't just focus on reading for fun, but also reading for information, a skill they'll need to be successful in the working world.

Even for struggling readers, there's a dual focus on teaching understanding as well as decoding. Third-grade teacher Dennis Purcell recently sat at a table with seven young readers, helping them with tough words as they worked their way slowly through a nonfiction book about Martin Luther King.

"Now, look at the picture. What do you think is happening there? Why do you think this is going on?" he asks. Purcell draws out each student, trying to help them analyze the image of a sit-in.

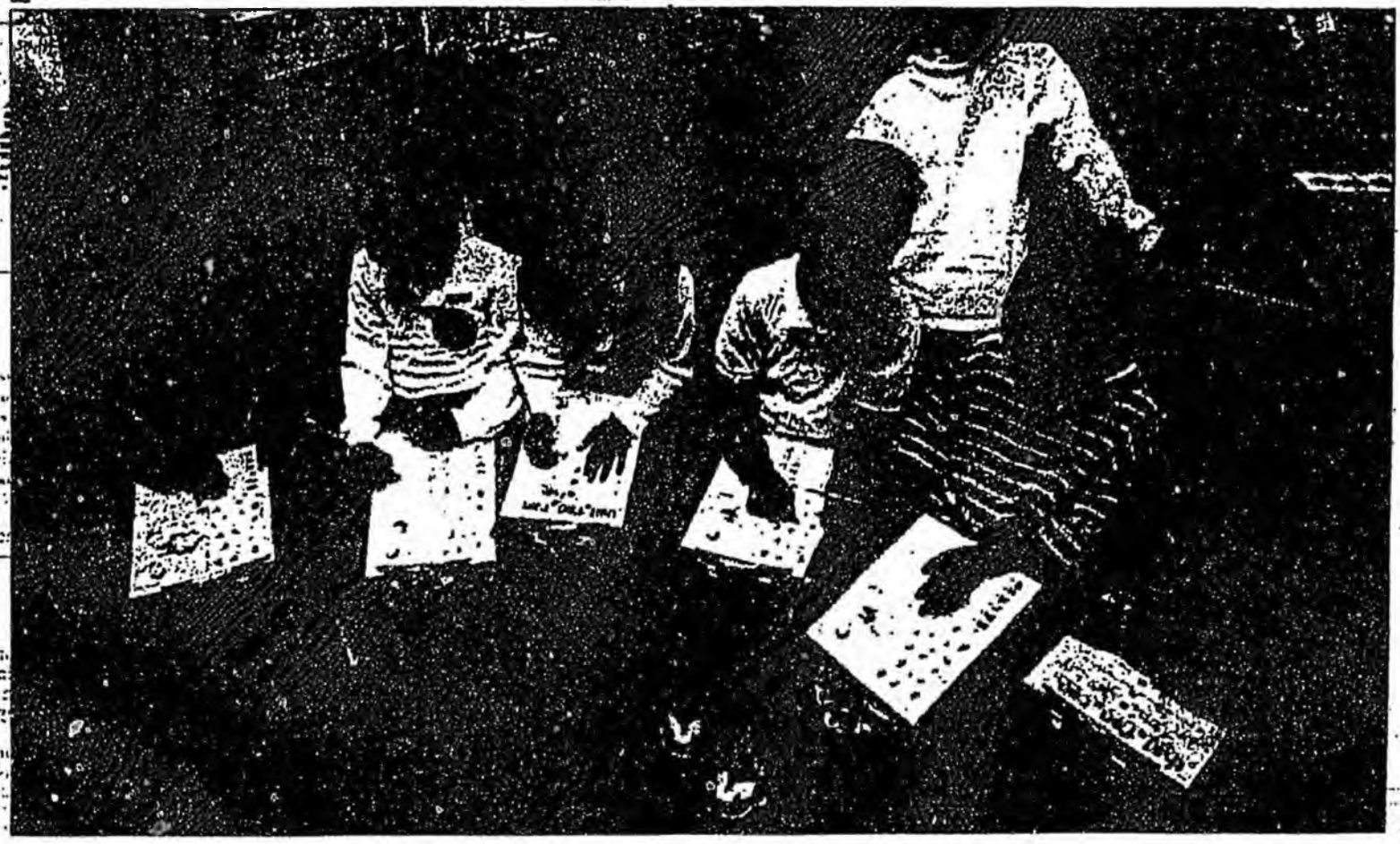
Those are just the kinds of comprehension questions being emphasized on the state's tough new set of performance-based tests. Those tests make clear that the state is putting a premium on understanding what words mean, not just how to recognize them.

Whole language:

A purple monster lives in a purple house. A striped monster lives in a striped house.

Whole language emphasizes story content to turn children on to reading. Students are encouraged to learn whole words at once, by sight, through seeing them in use. Teachers use oversized books with beautiful illustrations that capture children's attention. Students are encouraged to use pictures and other context clues to figure out what the words mean.

"Where Do Monsters Live?" — written by Rozanne Lanczak Williams and illustrated by Kathleen Dunne — uses bright illustrations to draw in the reader and repeats unfamiliar words to build recognition. Those words are often ones not covered by the rules of pronunciation emphasized in phonics.



Science supports 'sound' approach

By Kathy Lally
and Debbie M. Price
The Baltimore Sun

NEW HAVEN, Conn. — A gigantic white magnet fills the room and a small blond boy lies very still inside it. A great ping-pinging noise, like the sonar echo of a submarine, begins as the magnet goes to work, taking pictures of the boy's brain.

Words flash on a screen before the child. He is asked to decide whether the words rhyme and push a button. Computers whir madly, processing the brain pictures and the boy's responses.

Together, the magnet, the computers and a team of scientists and doctors are working to solve one of the great mysteries of humankind.

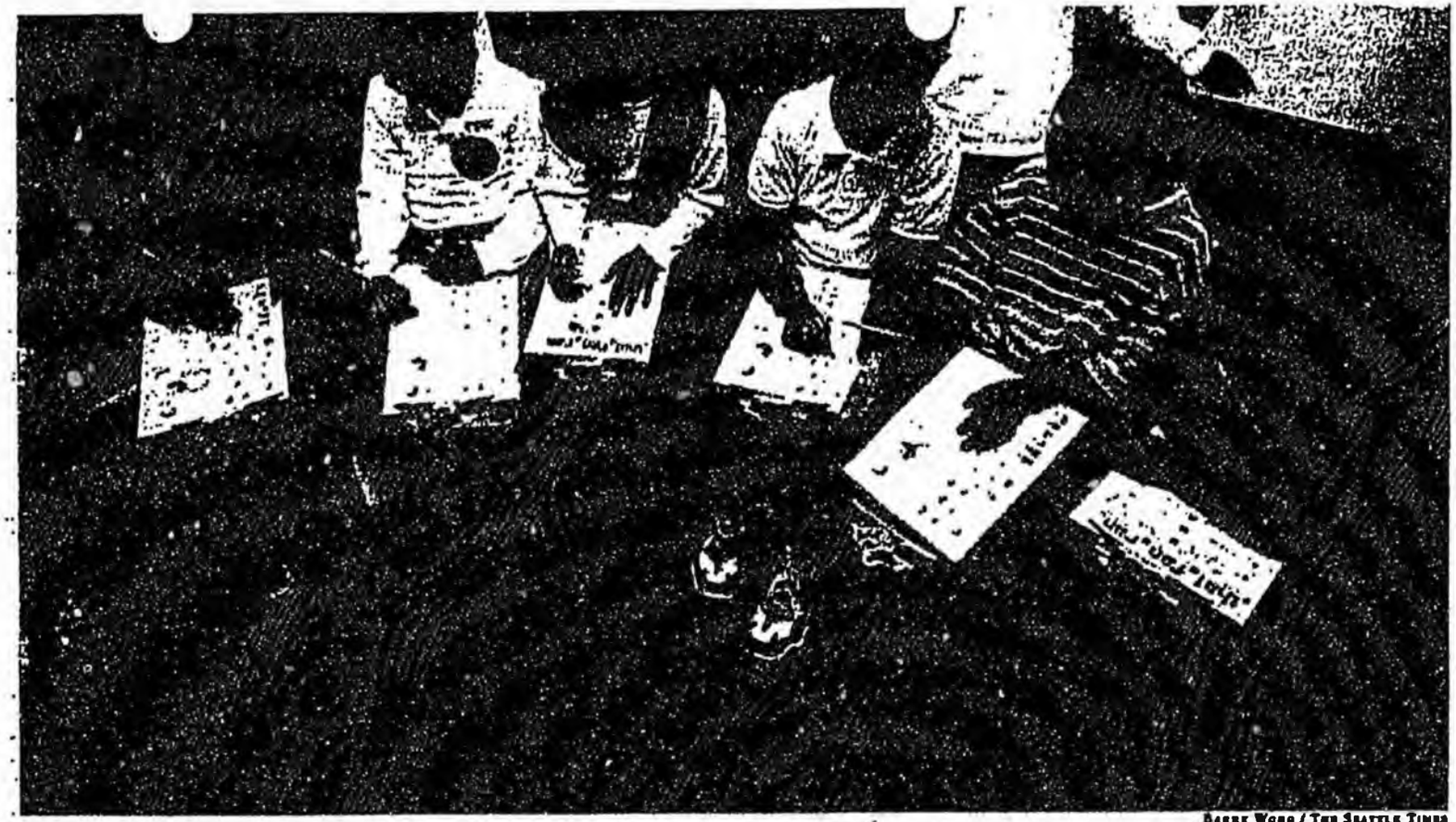
They are watching the brain read.

With the cutting-edge technology of the magnetic-resonance-imaging (MRI) device — commonly called "the magnet" — scientists at Yale University's Center for Learning and Attention have found a window on the brain. Through this high-tech porthole, they can see what their predecessors had deduced by studying children in classrooms. The brain reads by breaking words into sounds.

The scientists, led by Yale physicians Sally and Bennett Shaywitz, have identified the parts of the brain used in reading. By observing the flow of oxygen-rich blood to working brain cells, they have found that people who know how to sound out words can rapidly process what they see.

Lighting up the brain

These readers, asked to imagine "cat" without the "kah" sound,



BARRY WONG / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Kindergartners at Thurgood Marshall Elementary *in Seattle learn to read using the phonics-based DISTAR (Direct Instruction System for Teaching And Remediation) method. The system was first used in kindergarten and first grade, but now is employed throughout the school.*

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

the state's "essential learning" standards, specifically mention phonics as one of the necessary pieces of a reading program.

The shelves at teacher-supply stores tell a similar story. Where the racks used to be filled with whole-language-style literature, basic-skills and phonics materials are now on prominent display.

For some kids, teachers say the literature-based approach of whole language works just fine. At Sanislo, Kathy Donnelly and other teachers loved the emphasis on literature and spent PTA money and their own money to augment their collections of good books. "But we were still not getting to some kids — maybe half," she said.

About two years ago, the teachers realized reluctantly they needed to make changes. "In front of us, we saw these incredible things, kids developing a love of books for the first time," said Sanislo teacher Sherry Wicklund. "But it didn't show up on paper."

Sanislo's staff sat down as a group to bring more focus to the reading program. What they came up with includes a set of specific reading goals and a checklist of skills to be taught at each grade level.

Students are broken into small groups based on their skill levels, and there's a stronger emphasis on phonics and other basic reading skills for the poorest readers.

Early results are promising: After a half-year of school, children on average are demonstrating one to 1½ years' growth in their reading abilities.

Many, maybe most, schools have reached the same conclusion. In schools where teaching basic reading skills wasn't emphasized, it's now solidly back in the lineup.

The drive for reform

But nationally, and now in this state, the excesses of the whole-language movement have spawned a backlash.

There's new public pressure on educators to explain numbers like these: Fewer than half of the fourth-graders who took the new statewide test last spring reached the standard in reading.

For the past two years, the state's fourth-graders have scored barely above average — in the 52nd percentile — on the standardized Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills.

And one-third of Washington fourth-graders who took the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as "the nation's report card," fell below competence levels in reading in 1994. That's slightly better than the national average.

Private reading tutors are the ones parents often turn to when a child encounters reading problems in school. Many are seeing an increasing number of struggling readers, and many blame a lack of phonics instruction at early ages — or schools that drop phonics too early in a child's education — for the increase in their business.

If teaching children to read is the first business of the primary grades — some would say the only thing that really counts — why are so many schools failing?

"We lost our common sense for awhile. We're getting it back now," Bergeson said.

People are frustrated with educators asking for the public to trust them, she acknowledges. "We have had mediocre test scores. We're not doing a good enough job. It's what drove reform in the first place."

But the answer is not "for me to put on my phonics police uniform and go out to the schools and count the number of hours they spend" on phonics, she said.

She says the changes launched by the Education Reform Act of 1993 are in motion, working to make up for past mistakes, and politicians should let that process play out.

"The thing that drives me crazy is the amount of underestimation by legislators about the amount of work that's going on out there."

Jolayne Houtz's phone message number is 206-464-3122. Her e-mail address is: jhou-nws@seatimes.com

Dionne Searcey's phone message number is 253-946-3977. Her e-mail address is: dsea-nws@seatimes.com

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The scientists, led by Yale physicians Sally and Bennett Shaywitz, have identified the parts of the brain used in reading. By observing the flow of oxygen-rich blood to working brain cells, they have found that people who know how to sound out words can rapidly process what they see.

Lighting up the brain

These readers, asked to imagine "cat" without the "kah" sound, readily summon "at." And the MRI photographs show their brains lighting up like pinball machines.

Conversely, the brains of people who can't sound out words often look different on MRI pictures. There is less blood flow to the language centers of the brain and, in some cases, not much activity evident at all. Scientists are not sure why this is or what it means. But, simply put, without the ability to sound out words, the brain is stumped.

Research conducted over the past 20 years under the aegis of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md., has documented similar conclusions: Children need to understand the sounds of the English language and sound-letter relationships — known as "phonics" — before they can learn to read. For some, this comes naturally; others must be taught.

What's more, NIH-sponsored studies are finding that at least 95 percent of even the poorest readers can learn to read at grade level if they are given early and proper instruction in sound-letter relationships.

Research shows that most children who don't learn to read properly by third grade are likely to be poor readers their whole lives. NIH researchers now consider reading problems a major public-health threat.

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For years, such scientific research has been ignored by educators.

"The gap that exists between the level of knowledge and what we have implemented of that knowledge all across the board is absolutely awful and sad," says Sally Shaywitz, a pediatrician-scientist involved in reading research for almost two decades. "It would be a tremendous tragedy if, knowing what we know about how children learn, (that knowledge) were not put to work."

'The key is the right mix'

Over the past 15 years, G. Reid Lyon, a neuropsychologist in charge of the NIH's reading research, and his colleagues have observed more than 10,000 children and have published more than 26 books and 2,000 articles in their quest to discover why some children read with ease and others do not.

And they have studied the ways that children learn, using pure phonics, pure whole-language programs and combinations of both.

Their conclusion: Children learn to read best if they're first given "phoneme-awareness" training in the sounds of the language and then taught the letter-sound relationships of traditional phonics. All along, teachers should also expose children to literature by reading to them and giving them interesting books to read as in the whole-language method.

"To read the English language, there is no way to get around the fact that you have to decode it," Lyon says. "The key is the right mix and that you start early."

Reading block

5 Morning is reading time in the typical Puget Sound elementary school. Many are devoting a single chunk of time, from 90 minutes to 3 hours a day, solely to reading.

And reading isn't just the work of the classroom teacher anymore. Librarians, computer, music and physical-education teachers, special-education teachers all are being called on to help teach reading.

A playful approach

6 Learning to read is hard work, but that doesn't mean it can't be fun. Many schools try to keep a sense of humor as they teach reading.

At North Hill Primary, teachers and members of the the Parent-Teacher-Student Association organized a read-at-home incentive program they called "Prizemobile Night."

Students were asked to keep their TVs off and their books open one night last month. The principal, a parent and a teacher piled into a van and drove to selected homes to check up on the students, standing outside with balloons and a bullhorn, calling for the child to come out with book in hand to show they were reading and receive a prize.

During reading time in schools around the area, you may see students singing, dancing, clapping, miming words or tracing letters in the air. Some schools use magna-doodle writing boards or magnetic poetry, have children create their own stories or change the endings of stories, hold family pajama parties at school to encourage reading, bring in Sonics basketball stars and other luminaries to read stories aloud.

Reading groups

7 Many schools have moved away from whole-group instruction during reading time. They say that often meant the teacher working with a few students in one part of the room while everyone else did "busy work" at their desks.

Now, many teachers favor splitting classes into two or three small groups.

Many schools also group those students by ability, so the best readers are in one small group, the poorest readers in another. A key component of the Success For All program at Everett's Garfield Elementary, now in its second year, is putting students into ability groups, regardless of their grade level. Those students are tested every eight weeks and moved to new classes as they progress.

That has been a controversial practice, with some arguing it's a form of tracking that keeps the low-performing children from seeing role models in the better readers.

But Garfield teachers say it lets teachers zero in on each child's reading trouble spots, boosting up the poor readers while letting advanced students move forward at their own pace.

Writing

8 Many teachers consider writing an integral part of learning to read and weave it through their instruction. While parents may cringe at the notion of "invented spelling" — letting children spell words without correcting mistakes — some educators say letting children spell a word the way it sounds is really a phonics lesson in disguise.

At Phantom Lake Elementary in Bellevue, first-graders in the Reading Recovery program write a paragraph after each day's lesson, incorporating the vowel sounds or consonant combinations they learn earlier into their writings. Because one teacher supervises one child, every word and nearly every letter of the paragraph is carefully scrutinized and discussed.

Extra help for struggling readers

9 From before- and after-school reading clinics to one-on-one tutoring, children for whom reading is difficult often are the focus of special attention.

Children at Phantom Lake Elementary can arrive at school 40 minutes early for a "Read In" to receive extra help with reading or to simply participate in reading-related programs.

For four years, Phantom Lake has used Reading Recovery, an intensive, one-on-one reading program for struggling first-graders.

— Jolayne Houtz and Dionne Searcey

Education Hotline

Education is a coverage priority of The Seattle Times. If you've got a story tip, comment or suggestion on education coverage, or a question for our Education Q&A column, please call our Education Hotline at 206-464-3339. Or contact education editor Bill Ristow by fax at 206-464-2261 or by e-mail at bris-new@seatimes.com —

Achorage
Daily News
2/17/98

Would-be teachers flunk test

By ROBERT GREENE
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Virginia's governor, James Gilmore, meant to shock his audience this month when he reported that as many as one-third of would-be teachers in the state flunked a national test of basic reading, writing and mathematics.

If it was bad news for Virginia, it was worse for the nation. Virginia has the country's highest cutoff score for the Praxis I, used in 20 states to screen teacher-college candidates and beginning teachers. Scarcely more than half the students who took the test nationwide would have made the Virginia cut.

Last year, Alaska's Legislature passed a law requiring all new teachers to pass a standardized test before getting a state certificate. The law goes into effect July 1 this year.

"Virginia students would be doing much better than the national average," said Charlotte Solomon, in charge of the Praxis examinations for the Educational Testing Service, a private company that supplies the tests to states. "It begs the question of whether it's good enough."

Around the country, state education officials are asking whether tests of general knowledge and of specific subjects are rigorous enough to ensure that able people become teachers. The issue has risen in importance because of widespread efforts to raise standards for what children should know and be able to do.

For some states, it means setting standards for the first time.

Last October in New Hampshire, the board of education voted to adopt Praxis I starting this fall after years of opening the profession to anyone with a college teaching degree who could find work. Democratic Gov. Jeanne Shaheen vetoed legislation that would have required the tests for teachers who already have jobs.

TEACHERS: Would-be educators flunk Praxis tes

Continued from Page A-1

Many states use Praxis I or more advanced tests in the Praxis series used to certify graduates for general knowledge, professional skills and subject knowledge. Some states have their own tests.

Explanations vary on why scores are low, but poor pay tops the list.

"It clearly holds back who it is that's entering," said Gordon Ambach, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Teaching has become less attractive for women and minorities since barriers to other, more lucrative and prestigious jobs have been lowered.

Education officials also point out that not everyone with low test scores goes on to teach or even get an education degree.

In Pennsylvania, education officials are beginning to raise the bar for a number of tests. Among those being examined is a 120-question, general knowledge test for beginning teachers that covers social studies, math, literature and the arts, and science.

"We have a relatively high pass rate, but as we look at the exams and we look at the cut scores, we're not convinced that it is a meaningful exercise," said Michael Poliakoff, a deputy secretary of education. Nearly 91 percent of would-be teachers who took the general knowledge test last fall passed it.

But most of the test-takers scored just about at the national average of 657 on a scale of 600-695. The state passing score is 644, close to that of several other states. The highest cut score of any state is 649 in Maine, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island.

Like other critics, Poliakoff says the national average would look good if the test were demanding. But people are asked to do such things as put World War I, the start of the Great Depression, the New Deal and the Korean War in the right order.

The testing service doesn't say Praxis I results would compare with those on an SAT, a widely given test for college admissions.

"It's only partially true" that Praxis is an easier test, Solomon said, explaining that the tests have different aims.

But new Georgia and Delaware standards, comparable to those of other states, give some clue. State officials allow the SAT and ACT, another admissions test, to be used instead of Praxis I. A total SAT score of 1,000, with at least 520 on the mathematical and 480 on the verbal part, is acceptable.

The average SAT score for 1997 high school graduates was 505 verbal and math. Those who said will pursue education grees had scores of 48 bal and 479 math. Mat jors had scores of 549 v and 623 math. Languag literature majors had s of 609 and 546.

But the standards run afoul of the need to schools, especially in to-fill rural and inner schools.

North Carolina ha back off from higher dards several years ago. sissippi is debating wa for its cutoffs. Florida h lowed waivers.

Shortages also worry same Virginians who cate tough standards.

"You can begin to wo what's going to happen the road when more more people turn away preparing to teach," Thomas Elliott, an assi superintendent of educ

REMEDIAL COURSES IN TEXAS' COLLEGES

According to the Dallas Morning News, January 23, 1998 edition, "Funding set aside in the (Texas) state budget for remedial courses at public community colleges and universities has increased 346 percent in the last decade to a total of $172 million for the current two-year fiscal period...about 54 percent is to address students; deficiencies in mathematics, 22 percent in reading and 24 percent in writing."

That amounts to 46 percent of $172 million (79.12 million) in order to address the problems dealing with English/Language Arts/Reading. The article also stated that public community colleges went from $29.5 million to $145.7 million since the 1988 - 89 budget period. In other words, there has been a dramatic increase in spending on remedial education in colleges since the students who have been taught whole language instruction have entered their college years.

As the person who sent me this letter said, "I am not a "rocket scientist", but how hard is it to figure out what is happening.

CURRICULUM VITAE 1/1/98

Eldo William Bergman, Jr., MD

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Home Address: 4838 Waynesboro Drive, Houston, Texas 77035
Birth date: February 10, 1946, Brooklyn, New York
Family: Married, five children (14, 16, 19, 23, 26)

Current employment:

Consultant in Child Neurology and Developmental Medicine, Houston, Texas, 1993-
Executive Director, Texas Reading Institute, Houston, Texas, 1995-

Awards/honors:

The Jefferson Awards "In Recognition of Outstanding Public Service," presented by The American Institute for Public Service, Washington, DC, June 10, 1991
Exemplary Education Practice Citation, awarded jointly by the Texas Education Agency, Texas Association for Children with Learning Disabilities, and the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association, Austin, November 7, 1991
Mayor's Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service, June 11, 1992, Houston, Texas.
Spirit of Texas Salute, Houston KHOU CBS, November 27, 1992

Medical appointments:

University of Texas Medical School at Houston, Departments of Neurology and Pediatrics, Clinical Assistant Professor, 1980-

Education-related positions and appointments:

Special Education Parent Advisory Council, Houston Independent School District
Campus representative, 1986-1988
Executive Committee, Secretary, 1991-1992
Foundation for Independent Learning, Inc. (non-profit educational foundation)
Founder and Director, 1987-1989
Intelligent Learning Systems, Inc., founder, 1987-1992
University of Houston, College of Education
Adjunct Assistant Professor, Educational Psychology, 1987-1988
Texas Southern University, Center for Excellence in Urban Education
Adjunct Professor of Education, 1991-1993
US Dept. of Education:
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), 1991-
reviewer, technology grants
Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), focus group on strategic planning for IDEA, Part E (research priorities), 1993-95
Houston Independent School District, PEER (Peer Examination, Evaluation and Redesign) Committee on Reading, 1996;
Subcommittee on Persistent Reading Difficulties, 1996-8
Benchmark Schools Blue-Ribbon Advisory Committee, 1997
Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, advisor to members of language arts writing team, 1997

cc:Mail for: mel krogseng

Subject: Learning First Alliance

From: jimmyk@tenet.edu (James Kilpatrick) at CC2MHS1 2/13/98 8:04 AM

To: Mel Krogseng at LAA_STAY

Twelve national educational organizations have joined forces through the Learning First Alliance to improve student learning-a permanent partnership designed to deliver common messages to all parts of public education system, align priorities, share success stories, articulate the importance of collaboration at every level, and work toward long-term systemic change based on solid research evidence. The Alliance's member organizations reprsent more than 10 million individuals engaged in providing, governing, and improving America's elementary and secondary schools at the local, tate and national coalition focused in improving public education to involve both the CEO's and elected leadership of the major national organizations repressenting parents, teachers, curriculum specialists, school principals, administartors, school boards, state boards of education, chief state school officers, and teacher educators.

Executive Summary:
Every Child Reading -- An Action Plan

I. Why Reading reform is Essential

While 69 percent of African-American and 64 percent of Hispanic students scored below "Basic" in 1994, 31 percent of white fourth graders did.

II. Every Child Reading: An Attainable Goal

Our goal virtually all children to learn to read well. Using techniques available today -- and new approaches that research could readily produce and validate within a few years -- we could ensure reading success for all but a tiny proportion of healthy students.

III Every Child Reading: A Research Base

In forging a stratrgy to ensure success for all, it is essential to focus on practices grounded in research. This paper summarizes available research...

A. Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Programs

One of the most important foundations of reading success is phonemic awareness before first grade. Later, more direct instruction on the individual sounds that make up words is needed, so that children start more formal instruction in reading with a comfortable familiarity with the sounds that letters represent and with "hearing" those sounds within words.

B. Beginning Reading Programs

Unfortunately, it is also in first grade where common instructional practices are probably most inconsistent with the research findings. Many children need well-sequenced phonetic instruction early in first grade. Given this and the difficulties in identifying in advance which children will need systematic phonics, it is propably nest to start all children with phonetic strategies.

Early in first grade, children's reading materials should feature a high proportion of new words that use the letter-sound relationship they have been taught. A meaningful context can be created by embedding decodable test in stories that provide other supports to build meaning and pleasure.

C. Second Grade and Beyond.

With high quailty instruction and any other necessary tutoring or other assistance, most students should, by the end of first grade, be able to decode virtually and phonetically regular short word with short or long vowels, be able to read a lrage number of high frequency sight words, and have solid comprehension skills, both for material they read and for material read to them. Children who are not decoding and comprehending well at this point need immediate special attention.

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Council of Chief State School Officers
Education Commission of the States
National School Board Association
ational PTA
National Education Association
National Association of State Boards of Education
Nationa Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals

Future information or a complete draft copy (final will be release sson) contact Learning First Alliance 1001 Connecticut Ave. NW Suite 310 Washigton D.C. 20036
(202) 822-8405 x 40 http://www.learningfirst.org

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Dr. William D. Pfeifer • FAMILY CHIROPRACTIC CLINIC • Dr. Mary L. Pfeifer

2-6-98

ATTN: DOE Staff: please copy this fax to those listed below.

Kathie Berg,

I received the data you sent which consisted of the 1995-96 State report card. This is the same one I had from last year, which has limited data. If I understand you correctly, the State DOE has no additional data than what is reflected in this report. Is that correct?

Do you have the following:	FY97 data?	FY96
Total expenditures?	?	$610,367,479
ADM?	?	124,754
Special Ed: %ADM	?	18.1%
: Expenditures	?	??
Bilingual: %ADM	?	12.7%
: Expenditures	?	??
Migrant: %ADM	?	6.8%
: Expenditures	?	??
Title I: %ADM	?	9.7%
: Expenditures	?	??
Gifted: %ADM	?	4.1%
: Expenditures	?	??

NOTE: Gifted is not listed by school district in the back of the report, and I would like that data also. In addition do you have an ethnic breakdown of this data?

Am I correct that 51.4% of the ADM, or 64,124 kids, are in some type of supplemental program? What is the total expenditure on these areas along with the individual amounts? I am sure you have that in your budget documentation.

The report has the following number of students scoring in the bottom quartile: (Listed in % of "students tested" = 89.6%, 5.7% Absent, 4.7% SPED Excluded)

	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 11
95/96 CAT5-Reading	21.3%	20.8%	24.1%
96/97 CAT5-Reading	??	??	??
95/96 CAT5-language	25.5%	24.5%	24.1%
96/97 CAT5-langusge	??	??	??

Can you get me the number of kids at each Stanine level and percentile for these tests? I would be surprised if the department is not looking at that type of detail.

2901 Baranof Ave. • Ketchikan, Alaska 99901-5765 • (907) 225-9090 • Fax (907) 225-9001

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NOTE: If you add the special ed excluded kids to these percentages and give the benefit of the doubt to those absent, it raises these percentages significantly.

I realize that Harry Gamble will have the new report out in the future but would appreciate this information as soon as possible.

Thank you,

Dr William Pfeifer

Attn:DOE Staff
Since this did not come through well on the email I sent, I am faxing this and would appreciate it if you would copy this for the following people at DOE.

Kathie Berg
Shirley Holloway
Nanci Spear
Harry Gamble

cc:Sen Robin Taylor
cc:Linda Hardin

2901 Baranof Ave. • Ketchikan, Alaska 99901-5765 • (907) 225-9090 • Fax (907) 225-9001

See Dick Flunk

The evidence is overwhelming that kids with reading problems need phonics-based instruction. Why aren't educators getting the message?

By Tyce Palmaffy

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Inside a National Institutes of Health (NIH) reading lab, 11-year-old Alexis stumbles to decipher a short story. Reading out loud, she inserts the word "girl" at the end of a sentence in which it does not appear. She skips the word "the" and says "grader" instead of "grade." Instead of "goes," Alexis reads "got"; instead of "her," Alexis guesses "the." Later in the sentence, she substitutes "broom" when the words read "a round iron handle." This is a sobering display: Alexis, an otherwise bright sixth-grader who scores above the 70th percentile in all other academic areas, cannot read a simple sentence without several mistakes and frequent guesswork. Unfortunately, she is not alone.

Alexis is one of more than 10,000 participants in an ongoing 30-year, $200-million study of reading disabilities by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), a division of the NIH. Acting NICHD Chief Reid Lyon sadly notes that her case is typical of children who have not received proper instruction in how the sounds heard in speech are represented by the letter symbols used in print—the relationship known as phonics. Says Lyon, "There is no way to read if you are not very facile in the use of phonics."

The problem is that few readers experiencing difficulties similar to Alexis's are ever given the explicit phonics training they so desperately need. Instead, teaching methods variously termed "look-and-say," "sight method," "whole word," and the latest incarnation, "whole language," have dominated the education landscape for almost seven decades. As a result, millions of kids are consigned to a lifetime of unnecessary reading troubles because most policymakers and educators have either willfully ignored the NIH-funded research or are unaware of its existence.

This is clearly evident in the America Reads Challenge Act of 1997, President Clinton's five-year, $2.75-billion proposal to place volunteer reading tutors with minimal training in low-income schools. The program would hire reading specialists to give cram courses to these volunteers, but declines to incorporate the NICHD's findings into its recommendations. Its official literature tepidly states, "The U.S. Department of Education does not specify any particular reading instruction method." In addition, the federal government gives elementary schools $7 billion a year in aid to programs for special education, bilingual education, and low-income students without insisting that the instruction be research-based.

If Clinton's remedy is misguided, at least his focus on reading is well placed. The 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that more than 40 percent of fourth graders cannot read at the most basic level, indicating that they could not understand the "overall meaning of the text" or make simple inferences. The 1993 National Survey of Adult Literacy discovered that some 90 million Americans—nearly half the adult population—have severely limited literacy skills, and their ranks swell by millions each year. Bereft of the ability to use a bus schedule, write a short letter to address a credit problem, or calculate their savings on a sale price, they are much more likely to be unemployed, on welfare, or in jail than their fully literate peers. More worrisome is the fact that literacy skills among young adults and school-age children are declining.

Among minorities, the statistics are even more tragic. On average, black and Hispanic children score four grade levels below their white peers on reading tests. And this gap does not narrow over time: The average black college graduate reads at the level of the average white high-school graduate. To be fair, American schoolchildren overall ranked second only to Finland on the last international assessment of reading ability, but that provides little consolation to disadvantaged children who scored well below the average score of our major trading partners. Clearly our education system is leaving too many of its most vulnerable charges far behind in an age when literacy is the gateway to most important skills.

"If you don't know how the alphabet works, you can't learn how to use an alphabetic language. There is no argument," says a Harvard researcher.

The Reading Wars

What these kids don't know is that they are the casualties of what has been labeled the "reading wars." Across the country, school districts are embroiled in a bitter, decades-old dispute over how best to teach reading.

The latest uproar is swirling around the controversial whole-language theory first introduced in the early 1970s. Its supporters contend that children will learn to recognize individual words through actual reading, using context, pictures, and familiar words to understand the meaning of written passages even if they can't read every word. They deride skills-based phonics instruction as abstract and boring, favoring techniques such as reading to children and encouraging them to read and write early and often. "It's in the interaction with the text that children develop good solid hypotheses about the text, not through segregating sounds from the text," says Sharon Murphy, the outgoing president of the Whole Language Umbrella, an in-

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dependent professional association.

This approach gained thousands of acolytes during the 1980s. The nation's colleges of education produced a new crop of teachers weaned solely on whole-language philosophy, while influential professional associations such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association embraced its basic premises. At the state level, California spearheaded a virtual reading revolution. The state department of education rewrote its entire curriculum in 1987, ditching phonics for a literature-based, whole-language approach. Teachers were told to throw out their old methods and embrace the cutting edge. Other states and local school districts soon followed. "All the major publishers moved to whole-language readers once California implemented it," says Bonnie Grossen of the National Center To Improve the Tools of Educators, at the University of Oregon. "They had no sequenced instruction, just pretty pictures and poetry. It has taken hold in all 50 states."

Yet while educators and textbook publishers were enthusiastically welcoming whole language, the research evidence supporting phonics-first instruction and questioning the underpinnings of whole-language theory continued to mount. In 1985, the U.S. Department of Education released "Becoming a Nation of Readers," a report which concluded that "the issue is no longer . . . whether children should be taught phonics. The issues now are specific ones of just how it should be done."

Another federally funded study led to the publication in 1990 of *Beginning To Read*, which most researchers consider the seminal review of the pertinent scientific literature. Its author, Marilyn Adams, now a visiting scholar at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, says, "You can teach children more efficiently and effectively if you use phonics. If you don't know how the alphabet works, you can't learn how to use an alphabetic language. There is no argument."

These findings are beginning to have an impact. Several states, including North Carolina, Texas, Georgia, Washington, Wisconsin, Oregon, and Ohio have recently passed legislation recommending phonics education in the early grades. "We no longer will accept that kids cannot learn to read," says Cindy Cupp, the director of reading at the Georgia Department of Education. "Now the state is in favor of explicit phonics instruction."

The International Reading Association recently reversed policy, specifically promoting early phonics instruction as a necessary component of a comprehensive reading program, and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has come down squarely on the side of skills-based instruction for beginners. "We created a terrible nightmare for a lot of kids who haven't been able to learn to read using whole language by itself," says Beth Bader, the assistant director for educational issues at the AFT, the nation's second-largest teachers union. The National Education Association, the largest teachers union, still gives lukewarm support to whole language, but spokeswoman Karen Smith grudgingly admits that "many kids cannot learn to read without phonics." Dozens of news stories from school districts nationwide catalog widespread discontent with whole language and a resurgence of support for phonics-first instruction.

Most damaging to whole language's adherents, last year California punted its whole-language curriculum altogether, stressing the need for systematic, explicit phonics instruction in the early grades. The state reversed course in response to a wave of public criticism after California's poor performance in the 1994 NAEP, when it tied Louisiana for last place. Janet Nicholas, a member of the California State Board of Education, recently told the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce: "Unfortunately for California children, the unsubstantiated claims and enthusiastic visions of whole-language ideologues proved to be disastrous when applied to real children."

Early 20th-century educators derided phonics as the "drill-and-kill" method, evoking images of stern nuns leading chorus recitals of "a," "oo," and "th."

The reaction to California's actions was predictable. "Whole language is being used as a scapegoat for dropping scores, when California has many minorities and high immigration," says University of Arizona education professor Ken Goodman, regarded by many as the godfather of whole-language theory. It is true that whites are a minority in California and a large portion of its Hispanic population are recent immigrants who speak barebones English. Yet apologists for whole language ignore the fact that scores dropped equally among children whose parents graduated from college.

"These data [from the NAEP] underscore the fact that reading failure is a serious national problem and cannot be attributed to poverty, immigration, or the learning of English as a second language," says Reid Lyon, who has directed the NIH reading studies for the past six years.

The 10-Year Itch

Fortunately, many educators are admitting their mistakes and switching to what works. But it is easy to be skeptical about whether these reforms will last. The American education system is notorious for swinging dramatically from one philosophy to another. Embattled educators and parents looking for a quick fix rarely give meaningful changes

time to work. Historically, this latest reading shake-up fits into a pattern of reform and retrenchment dating back at least a century.

During colonial times, the formula was simple: Teach kids the relationship between letters and sounds and then let them read. This method went unchallenged until the mid-1800s, when the influential educational reformer Horace Mann excoriated the drilling methods of the past. In the stark language of his reports to the Massachusetts Board of Education, the letters of the alphabet were "skeleton-shaped, bloodless, ghostly apparitions." Instead of teaching individual sound-letter relationships, Mann thought children should focus on comprehension by learning whole words first.

Despite his suggestions, through the early part of this century most American schools continued to use the traditional method of first teaching the 44 sounds heard in speech and then relating them to the 200 letters and letter groupings that appear in English. Once they had mastered these skills, it was presumed, most children could "sound out" any word, even unknown ones. Comprehension was only limited by their speaking vocabularies.

To the layman, this makes perfect sense. As education professors Connie Juel of the University of Virginia and Isabel Beck of the University of Pittsburgh write in the AFT journal *American Educator*, "Given that letters and sounds have systematic relationships in an alphabetic language such as English, it stands to reason that those responsible for teaching initial reading would consider telling beginners directly what those relationships are." But progressive educators based at Columbia University Teachers College and the University of Chicago in the 1920s rejected the "code-emphasis" approach as an unnatural, undemocratic way of learning. Phonics was derided as the "drill-and-kill" method, evoking images of stern nuns leading chorus recitals of "a," "oo" and "th."

These educators reintroduced Mann's idea that children could read by learning to recognize whole words in context. Skills-based instruction, they argued, discouraged kids from acquiring a love of reading because of its rote drilling and memorization. What influential educators such as John Dewey advocated soon became known as the look-say approach. Textbook publishers responded quickly. Whereas colonial children (at least upper-class children) learned to read using Noah Webster's bestselling *Blue-Backed Speller* and the Bible, mid-20th-century youngsters were subjected to the simplistic, mind-numbing "Dick and Jane" series. Responding to children's limited capacity for memorizing whole words, school readers became increasingly repetitive and wholly uninteresting. "We stopped teaching kids rules," says Bader of the AFT, "and expected them to learn 2 million individual words instead of teaching them 100 rules to figure them out."

Look-say reigned controversy-free until 1955, when Rudolf Flesch published *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Flesch, an admirer of Dewey with a doctorate from Columbia Teachers College, criticized the look-say approach in strident language: "We have decided to forget that we write with letters and learn to read English as if it were Chinese. One word after another after another after another. If we want to read materials with a vocabulary of 10,000 words, then we have to memorize 10,000 words; if we want to go to the 20,000 word range, we have to learn, one by one, 20,000 words; and so on. We have thrown 3,500 years of civilization out the window and have gone back to the age of Hammurabi."

Flesch's critique of the education system, in which he likened current methods of reading instruction to the training of dogs, was understandably not well received. Yet his basic claim that look-say was unsupported by research piqued the curiosity of at least one noted researcher, Jeanne Chall of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She conducted a three-year study and a massive literature review, publishing the results in *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (1967), still widely read among educational researchers. Its central conclusion was that the evidence favored the code-emphasis approach, particularly for poor children and those showing early signs of dyslexia. An updated version published in 1983 surveyed the research since 1967 and found that the case for phonics-first instruction was even stronger.

These findings led to a revival of phonics-based instruction during the 1970s, only to have these gains undermined by the increasing influence of whole-language theory. Its grounding in a distinct philosophy of language and harsh indictment of the "Dick and Jane" readers distinguished it from the look-say approach, yet in the most important respect whole language did not differ at all: It defied common sense and ignored piles of research by de-emphasizing skills and focusing almost solely on comprehension. It was merely the latest fad in a long line of meaning-first approaches.

A Theory Discredited

Much of what whole-language advocates claim to have introduced is uncontroversial. All educators, including those who support phonics instruction, believe that children should begin reading

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real literature and writing as early as possible, that comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading, and that education should be relevant to students' lives.

It is the philosophy undergirding whole-language theory that troubles linguists and research psychologists who study how the brain processes language. The founders of whole language set themselves apart from the look-say crowd by advancing not only a new method of reading instruction but a new theory of how children acquire written language abilities. Isolated drilling in sound-symbol relationships was unnecessary, they argued, because learning to read would be as natural as learning to talk if meaning and purpose were emphasized. Indeed, whole-language theorist Frank Smith argued that skilled readers skip around instead of reading each word, using context to confirm hypotheses about the meaning of text. Hence education professor Ken Goodman's description of reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game." To a whole-language disciple, phonics instruction can only take place as a rare intervention while children are actually reading.

Whole language's infatuation with the contextual nature of reading is moored in a 1965 study by Goodman. During the study, beginning readers were given a list of words and then a passage with the same words in context. Observing that children's word-identification skills improved after reading the passage, Goodman concluded that context plays a central role in deciphering text.

Without systematic phonics instruction, 25 percent of children will not read with the facility required to glean meaning from text.

But when researcher Tom Nicholson revisited the study in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* in 1991, it fell apart. By controlling for the children's reading-skill levels and the order in which they received the two tests (to eliminate the "practice effect"), Nicholson found that context only helped poor readers and offered readers in general no significant benefit. "Goodman based his ideas on a poor study whose findings were never replicated," says Lyon of the NIH. "It never would have gotten through a National Institutes of Health review."

Eye-movement studies have further undermined whole language's faith in context by proving that skilled readers do not use context and prediction to capture a text's meaning; they actually process each word visually. Other studies by Keith Stanovich of the University of Toronto and Charles Perfetti of the University of Pittsburgh have shown that good readers seldom rely on context; instead, their decoding skills are so practiced and quick that they speed through text without effort. Less able readers struggle painfully to identify words, taxing their ability to understand the text. "It is only because readers (and listeners) process words so automatically and effortlessly that they have the mental time and capacity left to construct and reflect on that meaning and message," write Marilyn Adams and Maggie Bruck, of Montreal's McGill University, in *American Educator*.

The belief that reading is a "natural" activity entails changing the schoolhouse dramatically. Whole-language teachers tend to regard themselves as motivators rather than instructors, instilling enthusiasm instead of basic skills. For example, they favor "child-centered" over "teacher-directed" classrooms. "Children should be fully active participants in building your classroom environment and curriculum, engaged in all the critical and creative thinking those tasks require," writes Bess Altwerger, a leading whole-language proponent. "Even first-grade students are capable of working collaboratively in this regard, as long as you can accept an environment reflecting the development of children rather than adult proficiency."

These changes are troubling when one considers that Smith and Goodman's belief that learning to read is as natural as learning to speak is "accepted by no responsible linguist, psychologist, or cognitive scientist in the research community," writes Keith Stanovich, one of the foremost reading researchers in the world. Barbara Foorman, an educational psychologist at the University of Houston and an NIH researcher, points out that if reading were as natural as speaking, there would be no illiteracy in literate societies.

Although the basic principles of whole language have been discredited, its proponents are not bending. "There are different kinds of research, qualitative and quantitative," says Murphy. "Whole-language researchers tend to fall on the qualitative side." In short, they question the research method instead of answering the research. Indeed, many whole-language proponents have resisted evaluating their approach using traditional measures of student performance, preferring such techniques as "kidwatching" and long-term evaluations of students' "real" written work. They generally question the reliability of standardized tests and controlled studies as artificial methods that fail to take account of cultural and environmental differences. Phonics advocates regard this as subterfuge. "Some people just don't want to rely on research, which means that we repeat the same errors over and over again," says Harvard's Jeanne Chall with obvious frustration. "It's very sad."

Phonics Ascendant

In a training tape developed for teachers in California, an expert teacher-trainer demonstrates phonics in action. She holds up a "very hungry"

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stuffed bear named "Chuck," who is "choosing lunch." His diet, however, is limited: Chuck only wants foods that begin with the same sound as his name, such as "cheese, chips, and chopped-up chunks of peach." The teacher asks her class what else Chuck might like. One first-grader correctly ventures "cherry pie." Another child, as confused about edibility as the sound "ch," mistakenly offers "jacket." After briefly explaining his error, the teacher shows her students the word "Chuck," and points to the first two letters. In unison, her engaged children practice making the sound.

This exercise helps the children realize that the letters "c" and "h" together make a familiar sound heard in many of the words they speak. Afterwards, the teacher gives her children a small book that lets them practice this new skill by including many words spelled with a "ch"—what educational researchers term "decodable text." Sure, it's not *Treasure Island*, but the kids are learning to associate the sound with the symbol, enabling them to read "real" literature in the future. This is anathema to followers of whole language. "People from literature-based philosophies would freak out if they saw this. They don't want to work with kids on these subskills," says Lyon.

It is these subskills, however, that impoverished children and those suffering from reading disabilities such as dyslexia need the most. Research suggests that direct instruction in phonics is innocuous but unnecessary for the most able 50 percent of children. Neurologists speculate that their brains may be "hard-wired" at birth to dissect speech into individual sounds and, with a little formal instruction, easily match those sounds to individual letters and syllables. Once exposed to generous helpings of language, these kids quickly move from "see Spot run" to richer literature.

The next quartile of children will learn to read, but they may fall behind without strong early phonics instruction. For the remaining 25 percent, though, reading will be one of the greatest challenges they will face in life. To enable them to meet that challenge, Lyon says, "phonics is nonnegotiable." Without systematic, explicit instruction in the sound-symbol relationships that comprise the English language, they will not read with the facility required to glean meaning from text.

The NIH studies have demonstrated this over and over, at 12 sites including Yale, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Florida State, and the University of Houston. These studies have shown that the best predictor of the ability to comprehend text is the speed and accuracy with which a child reads individual words. In essence, good readers use phonics constantly, only with so much facility that it appears as if they are skimming and skipping around. It is poor readers who decode text using known words, context, pictures, familiar letter combinations, and plain old guessing. Their trouble does not lie in comprehending text; it is their inability to connect spoken with written language that frustrates them.

These children must be taught that individual sounds heard in spoken language—phonemes such as "ch"—can be represented by letter combinations, and that these sounds and letter clusters can be put together to form words. It is on this point that whole language and phonics-first teachers are most divided. Whole language instructs that phonics, if taught at all, should only be taught implicitly, allowing children to deduce the sound-symbol relationships through their engagement with text. The findings from the NIH directly contradict this. While many children easily grasp these connections, a significant number need them to be taught explicitly, says Lyon.

The Great Wall

So why the chasm between research and practice? How could a philosophy whose basic principles have been proven false survive and continue to gain supporters? Testifying before the Committee on Education and the Workforce in the House of Representatives this past summer, Richard Venezky of the University of Delaware said that part of the problem is that the government and various foundations fund the research but do not disseminate its findings. Indeed, during the committee's hearing on literacy, chairman William Goodling noted, "I've been here all these years and never knew there was an ongoing project on reading at the NIH." Neither did his colleagues, and since only 13 members of the 45-member committee even bothered to show up to the hearing, few of them found out about it.

More disturbing than Congress's ignorance is the situation on the front lines. The people who should be most familiar with the research—education professors, teachers, and school administrators—have routinely adopted instructional methods and curricula heavily influenced by whole language in spite of the overwhelming body of research evidence supporting phonics. It's as if educators have erected the intellectual equivalent of China's Great Wall, successfully thwarting researchers' efforts to invade the schoolhouse.

In part this is due to a lack of leadership at the federal level. The government funds research at

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the NIH, at the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois (which hand-picked Adams to write *Beginning To Read*), and at the University of Oregon's National Center To Improve the Tools of Educators, all of which have stressed the vital importance of early phonics instruction. Yet the U.S. Department of Education has hardly anything to say on the topic beyond reminding parents to read to their children. The result: Little of this research reaches the classroom.

State education agencies are equally hesitant to take a strong position. The Massachusetts State Department of Education refuses to make recommendations concerning instructional methods, and Patricia Webster of the New York State Department of Education said, "We don't suggest from this level how reading should or should not be taught in the classroom. Decisions like that are left to the local districts." William Farr of the Connecticut State Department of Education labeled Reid Lyon, a division chief at one of the most respected research institutions in the nation, an "extremist," adding that the state department takes no official position.

Still, plenty of education professors are familiar with the research, yet fail to incorporate it into their classroom instruction. Which begs a question: Why is whole language so seductive? Researchers speculate that whole language's popularity stems from teachers' search for a method that's easier for children and frees teachers from using the stuffy worksheets and dull drills of yesterday. "The whole-language movement should be about displacing compartmentalized instruction and rote facts and skills," write Adams and Bruck, phonics-first advocates. "And it should be about displacing such outmoded instructional regimens with highly integrated, meaningful, thoughtful, and self-gendering engagement with information and ideas." But Adams is quick to add that systematic phonics does not imply schooldays filled with painstaking recital of letters and syllables. All it takes, she says, is 20 to 30 minutes each day.

Whole language also flourishes because of the long-standing skepticism toward research in the education community. Even educational researchers admit to the shoddiness of educational research in the past, and the tendency of "the latest findings" to swing educators from fad to fad. "Very little research on anything ever makes it into the classroom. What you get are trends with very little research evidence to back them up," says Gerald Bracey, a research psychologist who writes widely on education issues. "Educators run from one fad to another," adds Smith of the NEA.

Further hampering attempts to extend research findings into practice is the fact that teachers are rarely taught how to read and analyze research evidence. For the most part, teachers colleges that serve as vocational schools are separate from research institutions, so professors who train teachers are insulated from professors who engage in research. "They're different professions," says Adams. "They go to different conferences and read different journals. The people who are doing research work in education are not well-informed about the real problems and needs of schools and teachers." There are exceptions, such as the Columbia University Teachers College and the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education, but the vast majority of teachers graduate from "normal schools" where training and research are not integrated. "Teachers see professors as very smart people who do very good work that has nothing to do with what they do," says Bracey.

With scant ability to discern research from opinion, teachers and even school superintendents often adopt unproven practices. "Unlike other research-based professions," writes researcher Bonnie Grossen, "our mechanisms for distinguishing fads that will probably fail from effective innovations are weak and ineffective." Hypotheses by education professors quickly become "theories," even though they have seldom been subjected to any rigorous testing. As the dominance of whole language shows, this has been particularly true in the field of reading. "Hard science is often alien to primary-level reading instruction, snake oil and charismatic solutions being preferred far more often than this country can afford," said Venezky in his congressional testimony.

At the graduate level, whole language continues to inform reading instruction. In fact, surveys of teachers and the textbooks they use in education schools confirm that most teachers are not taught systematic phonics and are hardly ever told that whole language instructional methods are even contested. Reid Lyon tells of his encounter with a California teacher seeking a doctorate in reading instruction who approached him after a lecture. Her face wet with tears, she told him that no one had ever exposed her to phonics-based instruction. "The majority of teachers we've talked to who have been trained over the last 10 years have never even discussed these issues," says Lyon. "Teachers are resentful that they haven't been presented this in the past," says Louisa Cook Moats, the director of training at the Greenwood School, a teacher-training institute in Vermont.

Whole language flourishes in part because of the long-standing skepticism toward research in the education community.

Education schools are routinely criticized for their emphasis on theory over practice. This is es-

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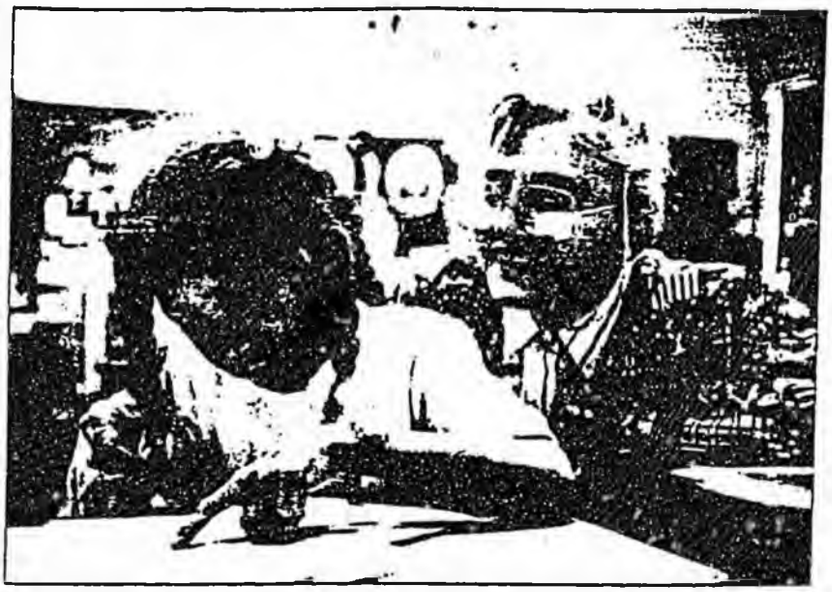
pecially true in reading. One survey published in the journal *Teacher Education and Special Education* (1989) found that less than 10 percent of teachers had ever seen their professors demonstrate methods of reading instruction tailored to children's differing needs. Fewer than 5 percent said that what they had learned about teaching reading actually related to what they did in the classroom. *Remedial and Special Education* published a survey in 1992 of 100 learning-disability experts, including many professors of reading instruction. It found that few assigned any importance to understanding basic language structures like syllables and phonemes. "The most common comment I get is that nobody ever taught me any of the substantive part of what it means to teach students to read," says Moats, who is directing NIH's study of reading in the District of Columbia's public-school system. "They continually ask, 'Why didn't anyone teach me these things?' "



A phonics-based reading program and committed teachers turned Houston's Wesley Elementary into an academic powerhouse.

Good question. Part of the answer is that states rarely require more than one semester of reading instruction to obtain certification to teach. Another part is that few school districts evaluate teachers using student performance as a measure. In short, professors are wholly unaccountable for the teachers they graduate. They thus have little incentive to indulge in potentially tedious practice sessions and lessons in how to perform an effective phonics drill. "The average person who's teaching reading on a university faculty knows very little about linguistics," says Venezky, now serving a year-long post as a resident scholar at the U.S. Department of Education. "To them, phonics is very often frightening, foreign, and very difficult to teach." Evidently, education professors cannot imagine themselves holding up that hungry bear named Chuck.

Phonics in Action

In January, Secretary of Education Richard Riley traveled to Houston, Texas, to laud the first city to accept President Clinton's reading challenge. Curiously absent from the festivities was the Houston education system's shining star, former Wesley Elementary Principal Thaddeus Lott. During the early 1980s, his success in turning Wesley from a typical urban failure into one of Texas's highest-performing elementary schools led almost 300 Houston schools to follow his lead in abandoning the school district's recommended curriculum.

Administrators instead used their discretionary funds to purchase DISTAR (Direct Instructional System for Teaching and Remediation), the program Lott had introduced at Wesley in 1975. DISTAR, now known as Reading Mastery, is a direct-instruction program developed in the 1960s by Siegfried Englemann, a former preschool teacher. It incorporates intense, systematic phonics instruction into a fast-paced, heavily scripted program with constant teacher-student interaction.

Lott's success was swift. In 1980, just three years after the school's third graders were first taught using DISTAR, 85 percent passed the reading comprehension portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), up from 18 percent in 1977. In 1996, 100 percent of Wesley's third graders passed the TAAS, even though more than 80 percent of the kids in the district are poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. "Direct instruction has filled the void left by colleges and universities and teacher training institutions," says Lott, who is now franchising success by running Wesley as one of four charter schools under his control. "We've been fighting this whole language wave for years. People who only know how to teach whole language don't know how to teach phonics."

Observers tend to chalk Wesley's excellence up to Lott's charisma and sense of mission. But his results should not be so surprising; Lott simply adopted the best program available. In 1977, Project Follow Through released the results of its decade-long, $500-million study of teaching methods that began as part of Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty." The federal government study rated direct instruction the best method by which to improve student performance. Literature-based programs that were avowedly child-centered rated lowest. Paradoxically, direct-instruction programs produced the greatest improvement in student self-esteem, while the child-centered methods that claimed to raise student self-esteem ranked much lower.

Still, direct instruction has suffered from criticism that its strict program handcuffs teachers.

Photo by Joel Deal

and few schools have adopted it nationwide. Here's the typical response from a direct instruction teacher, though: "The bottom line is that when I get third graders reading on a first-grade level, I don't have time for flexibility," says Dianne Bissell, a former elementary-school teacher at one of the schools in Houston that adopted DISTAR after observing Wesley's dramatic improvement. "Direct instruction works."

These schools purchase DISTAR with Title I funds granted by the federal government to provide educational opportunities to low-income children. At other schools, most Title I money is wastefully spent on early intervention programs such as Reading Recovery (which is estimated to cost between $8,000 and $9,000 per child), teacher aides, and remedial help long after intervention would have been most effective. The NIH has developed tests that cost $15 per student to assess whether children will have trouble learning to read in first grade. When used in conjunction with an early intervention program such as DISTAR, Lyon says, 85 to 90 percent of poor readers can reach average levels if diagnosed early enough. As time goes by, the costs rise as the probability of success declines.

Bridging the Chasm

The "reading wars" have become a political battle rife with smears and misrepresentation. Whole language was blamed entirely for sinking reading scores in California, even though the state also failed to train teachers in the new literature-based curriculum. Critics of the public-school system such as Samuel Blumenfeld view whole language as simply the latest attempt by the education establishment to "dumb down" America's children, clearing the path for a socialist revolution. Whole-language adherents tend to disclaim the validity of any scientific study and accuse phonics-first supporters of a hidden agenda: delegitimizing the public schools to win funding for private religious schools.

But basic skills are an issue of common sense, not conservative policy. Consider the sport of wrestling. A wrestling match between two skilled athletes may appear to a casual observer to be as natural as a good reader breezing through text. What the observer does not know is that a wrestling match is made up of dozens of individual moves and skills that the competitors have practiced for much of their lives. Wrestling coaches teach all of these skills in isolation and then let their wrestlers practice them on the mat. After hours of practice and drill, these skills are so automatic and fluid that the wrestlers do not even need to think about them during a match. They can worry about broader strategy—just as a reader with excellent decoding skills can concentrate on comprehension. From sports to driving to chess, in no other field except reading would teachers tell their students that learning the basic skills first is unimportant, perhaps even harmful.

It's true that basic skills are no panacea. Reading is a complex activity, and a host of other factors impact how well children learn the relationship between their spoken language and its representation in print. Most important is a child's readiness upon entering school. A 1995 study found that children in professional families heard 2,150 words per hour on average, working-class kids were exposed to 1,250, and children on welfare heard only 620 words per hour. Upper-income parents were also much more likely to ask stimulating questions and challenge their children's cognitive skills. These kids stepped through the kindergarten doors far more experienced with language, giving them a tremendous advantage in the acquisition of reading skills.

While bearing in mind the effects of the home environment on learning, it is equally important to note the further damage caused by receiving ineffective methods of reading instruction. The NIH studies have proven that poor children whose parents do not expose them to books and language suffer the most under programs like whole language that do not emphasize skills. Their difficulties are compounded when they reach higher grades and have yet to learn the fundamentals of reading, hindering their study in all other subjects. And Thaddeus Lott's success with direct instruction proves that a disadvantaged background does not prevent children from succeeding alongside their suburban peers—if they are taught using research-based methods.

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Egalitarians worried about the increasing distance between rich and poor should take heed of researchers' warnings. Current methods of reading instruction are exacerbating differences in educational opportunities, allowing the well-heeled sons and daughters of loquacious professional parents to reap the advantages of wealth while impoverished children linger behind.

As Flesch wrote more than 40 years ago, "There is a connection between phonics and democracy—a fundamental connection. Equal opportunity for all is one of the inalienable rights, and the word method interferes with that right. . . . [I]t returns to the upper middle class the privileges that public education was supposed to distribute evenly among the people."

Tyce Palmaffy is the assistant editor of Policy Review.

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No Excuses

Houston educator Thaddeus Lott puts failing schools to shame

By Tyce Palmaffy

Gayle Fallon wanted to give her 10-year-old godson a measure of stability in life. With a father who had compiled a long record of felony convictions and a mother imprisoned for shoplifting after two prior convictions for drug possession, the boy had shuffled in and out of foster care since birth. To worsen matters, he was languishing in the chaotic environment of a dismal urban school. Fallon, the president of the Houston Federation of Teachers, knew that without a decent education, her godson might stumble along the same destructive path his parents had followed. So in 1994 she secured him a spot at Mabel B. Wesley Elementary, an innovative public charter school on the outskirts of Houston.

"I love that program," Fallon says. "I wouldn't invest my godson in it if I didn't."

Fallon's praise evokes a sun-dappled public school set against a leafy suburban backdrop. And so would Wesley's manicured lawn, pristine brick facade, and buffed floors—if you ignored the barbed-wire fencing and boarded-up houses encircling the school. In fact, Wesley Elementary serves the violent, drug-infested Acres Homes section of Houston. All of its students qualify for federal Title I education funds earmarked for disadvantaged children, and its student body is 99 percent minority (93 percent black, 6 percent Hispanic). The lives of many closely mirror that of Fallon's godson.

We have come to expect mediocrity from schools whose students are saddled with such tragic circumstances. But since Thaddeus Lott became its principal in 1975, Wesley has graduated thousands of children whose reading and math scores rival those of their suburban peers. Before Lott introduced his educational philosophy, only 18 percent of Wesley's third-graders were scoring at or above grade level in reading comprehension on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. By 1980, 85 percent were achieving at or above grade level. In 1996, 100 percent of Wesley's third-graders passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in reading. Statewide, fewer than 70 percent of third-graders in schools with similar demographics passed.

To achieve this astounding turnaround, Lott eschewed popular nostrums—computers, school-to-work initiatives, parental involvement—for the basics: a proven curriculum, rigorous teacher training, strict discipline, high expectations of teachers and students, and a fervent belief that any child can learn.

"It's a myth," says Lott, "that if you're born in a poor community and your skin is a certain color that you can't achieve on a higher level."

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Having succeeded at Wesley, Lott wanted to vindicate his beliefs at other troubled schools. In this desire the community saw an opportunity to have every Acres Homes child schooled by Lott. So its residents petitioned the Houston school board to allow Lott to manage Wesley and three neighboring schools as a separate district of charter schools. The contract was signed in spring 1995, making Lott's district the first charter-school arrangement of its kind in Texas, predating even the state law encouraging communities to establish charter schools. The charter's goal: To have 70 percent of all children who have spent three years in the charter system scoring at or above grade level.

The charter gives Lott total freedom to train staff, develop a curriculum, and make hiring, firing, and promotion decisions at the four schools. The charter "allows us to feel like we're not committing a crime by doing things differently," says Lott. "It does not release us from accountability, though. We have a three-year contract, and the community expects results." As the equivalent of a district superintendent, Lott reports directly to the superintendent of Houston schools, enabling him to sidestep several layers of bureaucracy.

Only $2,500 Per Child

It is 8 A.M. at Wesley, and Mary O'Connor's third-graders are in a hurry. They are leaving on a field trip at 9, and there's plenty of learning to do before then. Not a moment is wasted as they correct their math homework, recite vocabulary lists, and read from a novel, Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*. By 9 A.M., they have accomplished more than many classes do all morning.

This is the typical classroom at Wesley: The pace is quick, the goals are set high, and no disruptions are tolerated. "We have a lot of ground to cover," says Lott. "The success of these kids depends on the percentage of time they are on task. We can't let one or two students disrupt the educational experience." The first lesson Wesley kids learn is how to walk through the halls quietly, single-file with hands folded. Fighting is forbidden.

The pace is rooted in the curriculum. Upon entering Wesley as principal, Lott purchased the Direct Instructional System for Teaching and Remediation (DISTAR), a program developed at the University of Illinois during the 1960s. Known now as Reading Mastery and Connecting Math Concepts, it is based on the direct-instruction model of teaching, in which students and teachers engage in a lively, interactive regimen of structured drills and sequential lessons, each building on the last. DISTAR's phonics-based reading lessons are literally scripted for the teacher, who is required to ask 200-300 questions per day, often in rapid-fire sequence. The children's high-decibel choral responses may sound like a high-school cheerleading squad hopped up on No-Doz, but they are learning the relationships between the sounds and the letters that constitute the English language. And there's no quibbling with the results at Wesley.

During Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" the federal government began Project Follow Through, which spent $500 million and many years investigating the most effective pedagogy for disadvantaged students. It concluded that direct instruction was the only method that even came close to elevating poor readers to the 50th percentile in achievement. Child-centered approaches that diminish the teacher's role in the classroom and reject the teaching of basic skills finished in the cellar. Ironically, researchers also found that direct instruction elevated students' self-esteem even more than the child-centered methods that ascribe a central role to high self-esteem and maintain that self-esteem suffers in heavily controlled teacher-directed environments. Disadvantaged students succeed more often with direct instruction, however, and Lott knows that achievement builds self-esteem, not the other way around.

Direct instruction works so well that Lott steers just 3 percent of Wesley students into special-education classes. By comparison, 10 percent of all Houston schoolchildren are labeled special ed.

Houston schools can mask poor achievement by inflating their special-ed ranks because special-education children do not count toward a school's average TAAS scores. Lott refuses to engage in such subterfuge. By exempting only 3 percent of its students for special ed, Wesley's TAAS scores represent more than 90 percent of the student body (a small percentage of Hispanic children are exempted for taking the test in Spanish). Only five of 242 other Houston schools test more children; most test well below 70 percent.

"Other principals hire remedial teachers," says Phyllis Hunter, manager of reading instruction for the Houston school district. "Thaddeus hires teachers who keep kids out of remedial classes." In fact, Wesley retains just one special-ed teacher, which helps to trim its costs to an average of $2,500 per child—nearly $1,000 less than the district average. "We've always done more with less," boasts Lott.

Lott held to his faith in basic skills while his counterparts swooned over the now-discredited "whole-language" theory of reading, which disavows explicit phonics instruction and views teachers more as "learning facilitators" than instructors. "People started teaching without ever giving kids any decoding skills," Lott says. "They gave them a bunch of books and said, 'Read.' That was the fallacy of the whole-language bandwagon."

So many educators jumped on this bandwagon that Lott, in the pre-charter era, had to run candy sales and forgo technology upgrades to purchase DISTAR because it was not on the state's list of ap-