

Reading instruction is for everybody —even teenagers

In recent years, the nation has made significant improvements in early reading instruction, using research-based programs to help ever-larger numbers of children master the mechanics of reading by the time they finish the 3rd grade. This work is, and must remain, a high priority.

But time has come to acknowledge that reading instruction is just as important for children in grades 4–12 as it is for their younger siblings. According to the Nation's Report Card, more than two thirds of the country's 8th graders read below the proficient level. And while 9 year-olds have made significant gains on national reading assessments over the last three decades, 17 year-olds have made no improvement at all. Schools must *continue* to focus on

literacy throughout the K–12 curriculum – teaching not just phonics but also reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing – or else young people will continue to lose the momentum they gained in elementary school, and the country will continue to squander its considerable investment in early reading instruction.

America needs a solution to its adolescent literacy crisis. That's why some of the nation's most prominent education groups have joined together to send a powerful message: *We know how to help our middle and high schools teach reading and writing more effectively.*

We're on the same page. How about you?

Six Ways to Take the Lead on Adolescent Literacy

- **Create a literacy plan.**
Define a clear vision of effective literacy instruction, and decide exactly how to make it happen at the school, district, and/or state level.
- **Adopt clear, coherent, and rigorous curriculum standards for middle & high school literacy.**
Define literacy standards for every academic content area, and link them to state accountability systems.
- **Build schools' capacity to assess students' individual needs.**
Achievement tests aren't enough. Schools need to diagnose students' specific needs in order to give them appropriate reading instruction.
- **Deliver intensive high-quality interventions to students who read far below grade level.**
It doesn't help to give students more of the same, low-level remedial classes; they need accelerated reading programs, designed to help them catch up, not drop out.
- **Help all teachers learn the basics of literacy instruction.**
Not every middle or high school teacher needs to be a reading specialist, but all teachers should know how to teach the reading and writing skills that are essential to their own content areas.
- **Make a long-term commitment.**
School principals, superintendents, and other education leaders must be clear: This is no passing fad. Nothing is more central to the success of middle and high students than literacy instruction.

A common agenda for middle and high school improvement, shared by all of the following reports:

Biancarosa, G. & Snow, C.E. (2004). *Reading Next—A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy: A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (2005). *Reading to Achieve: A Governor's Guide to Adolescent Literacy*. Washington, DC: Author

National Association of Secondary School Principals (2005). *Creating a Culture of Literacy: A Guide for Middle and High School Principals*. Reston, VA: Author.

National Association of State Boards of Education (2005). *Reading at Risk: How States Can Respond to the Crisis in Adolescent Literacy*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

