



EVERY CHILD A READER

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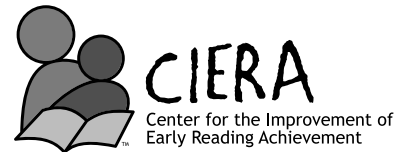


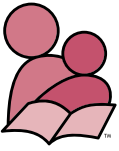
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EVERY CHILD A READER OVERVIEW

PRIORITY 1:

All students will read independently and well by the end of 3rd grade.

President's and Secretary's Priorities,
U.S. Department of Education, 1997

Learning to read in the first several years of school is essential to success in later grades and in life.

The national report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties*, describes the source of successful third grade reading: hard work by children, Head Start teachers, preschool teachers, primary-level teachers, and adults in children's homes and communities.

Reading is the cornerstone of education and the foundation of lifelong learning. If children are not independent readers by the end of third grade, it is unlikely that they will be successful in the middle grades and beyond.¹ Children who are not independent readers by the end of third grade rarely “catch up” later.

Is the goal of independent reading for all third graders realistic? Actually, most American third graders can read, if reading is defined as figuring out the words on a page. But many children—perhaps as high as 40%²—spend so much time figuring out the words that they cannot attend fully to the message. Other students learn to say the words accurately but do not attend to what they are reading to see if it makes sense. These are the children who struggle in the middle grades when reading tasks in science, mathematics, and literature become demanding.

The National Academy of Sciences recently asked a panel of experts to examine existing research on reading acquisition to establish what can be done to prevent this level of reading difficulties among America's children. The panel's conclusions were summarized in a report called *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*.³ The report is extensive, but its central message is consistent and unwavering: The vast majority of children can learn to read well.

The tasks differ along the way from preschool through the primary years, but many people collaborate in the creation of successful third-grade readers. While we would not expect children in a Head Start program to be decoding multisyllabic words in the way that second graders can, without the building blocks of Head Start—tasks such as learning letter names, becoming aware of how books work, and reading their own and their classmates' names on coatracks—second graders might not be prepared to decode multisyllabic words.

Further, while primary-level teachers may provide many appropriate experiences for developing word recognition and comprehension, they cannot do the job entirely on their own. In order for children to become the readers that our society needs, they must apply what they learn in school to everyday reading and writing at home and in their communities. Adult support at home and in the community will dramatically increase the likelihood that children will get the reading exposure they need to become successful readers. Many contribute to the creation of successful third-grade readers and this creation occurs over a long period of time.⁴

A wealth of information on the learning and teaching of early reading has accumulated over the past 30 years. Efforts to summarize this information have included *Becoming a Nation of Readers*⁵ and *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print*.⁶ Recent efforts have integrated ideas from the ever-expanding research such as the report commissioned by the National Academy of Sciences⁷ and *Improving the Reading Achievement of America's Children*.⁸ Often, however, these documents are not easily accessible for those who are most directly involved in children's reading acquisition—primary-grade teachers. *Every Child a Reader* is intended to remedy this situation by presenting research findings in a useful form for teachers, particularly those in Title I schools with many students in homes at or below the poverty level.

Although *Every Child a Reader* is aimed specifically at Title I schools, teachers and administrators in many schools and districts will find the guidelines in *Every Child a Reader* to be useful.

We focus on Title I schools because the design and implementation of reading instruction from preschool to third grade are especially critical in these schools. That focus does not mean that expectations are low or that the prognosis is poor. To the contrary, children challenged by poverty can and do learn to read well when they get good instruction and many opportunities to read and write. They should *not* be held to a lower standard. However, a significant portion of children in high-poverty schools are likely to require sustained instruction and assistance throughout the primary years. Since the intent of Title I is to provide such support for low-income children,⁹ the application of ideas from the large body of knowledge on learning and instruction of early reading to Title I schools seemed most appropriate. The eight topics of *Every Child a Reader* present a comprehensive summary of the knowledge base that can make the goal of independent third-grade reading a reality for many more American children.

Why is early reading of such concern today?

- Students are being asked to handle more complex cognitive tasks at earlier stages in their schooling. Success in early reading is critical to successful performance on these higher order tasks.
- When students experience early reading failure, it is extremely difficult for them to catch up later.
- Recent research has many suggestions for early reading instruction. Practicing teachers and teacher educators need to learn about this work.
- A large percentage of students who live in poverty require intensive help in understanding the nature of print and how to negotiate it.

Underlying Perspectives of *Every Child a Reader*

Reading educators have been preoccupied with the methods used to teach reading. Claims are often made that one teaching method is better than another. By summarizing the existing research on what children need to learn and how they learn it best, *Every Child a Reader* directs teachers' attention to the important processes of learning to read rather than the techniques of a single teaching method or philosophy.

Recommended practices are based on research.

A large body of knowledge about the learning and instruction of early reading has been developed through carefully conducted studies. Most of these studies took place in classrooms. *Every Child a Reader* includes references to the original studies, so they may be examined more carefully by those who wish to implement the strategies explored in the research.

Word recognition and comprehension are emphasized.

Word recognition and comprehension need to be balanced in reading instruction. A conventional view suggests that word recognition instruction is emphasized in the early elementary grades and comprehension instruction begins in the middle grades, but current research suggests that both should be taught throughout the early years.

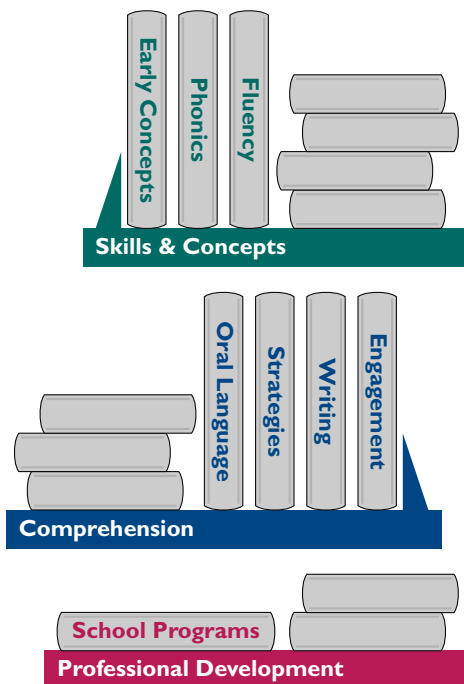
Practices cover a developmental continuum from kindergarten to third grade.

In the past, it was often assumed that early reading activities occur only in first grade. We now know that we must consider the early literacy skills and concepts that kindergartners already possess when they begin school, as well as the ways in which those skills develop from kindergarten through third grade. Further, some students need extensive follow-up in second and third grades to learn skills traditionally acquired in first grade. *Every Child a Reader* places both the expected accomplishments of students and suggested practices for teachers on a continuum from kindergarten through third grade.

Appropriate practices are suggested for struggling readers and English language learners.

Although the recommended practices of *Every Child a Reader* are aimed at preventing later reading difficulties, the need for interventions or remedial instruction for some children in second and third grades is acknowledged. Struggling readers are children who have not accomplished what most children their same age have accomplished. Struggling readers need additional time and attention; however, the form of the attention for a third grader who has not reached an accomplishment usually attained in first grade may be different than the attention for a first grader who has not achieved the same accomplishment. Similarly, English language learners require specialized attention in both reading and the acquisition of English language skills.

Topics of *Every Child a Reader*



The organization of a library fits the organization of this series. Like libraries where materials are organized according to topics, *Every Child a Reader* is organized by topic. Where a topic is located in a library system—or in reading instruction—does not influence a topic’s importance. All of the topics are important—skills and strategies, comprehension foundations, and professional development.

Within the sections of the *Every Child a Reader* library, there are books with a range of related topics. There are other topics that could be included on each of the library’s shelves—and they may be added in future issues of the CIERA research implementation series. Further, a particular volume could become a book series. But the existing library contains the basic topics necessary to the development of successful third-grade readers.

TOPIC 1 Oral Language and Reading

Children’s oral language abilities are interwoven with learning to read and write. The oral language children acquire as preschoolers helps them to connect words and sounds with print. Throughout the school years, oral language is both a means whereby children learn about reading and a goal of reading instruction.

TOPIC 2 Concepts of Print, Letter Naming, and Phonemic Awareness

Two powerful predictors of first-grade reading achievement are letter-name knowledge and **phonemic awareness** (the conscious awareness of the sounds in spoken words). To apply this knowledge successfully to learning to read, children need to understand the purposes and conventions of reading and writing.

TOPIC 3 Phonics and Word Recognition Accuracy

To recognize unfamiliar words when reading, successful beginning readers use **phonics** (letter-sound associations). Phonics knowledge must be applied to unfamiliar words in reading text and requires monitoring for meaning. To prepare for middle-grade reading, children must augment phonics skills with knowledge of English morphology—meaning units such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes.

TOPIC 4 High-Frequency Words and Fluency

Proficient readers recognize the vast majority of words in texts quickly, allowing them to focus on the meaning of the text. Since approximately 300 words account for 65% of the words in texts, rapid recognition of these words during the primary grades forms the foundation of fluent reading.

TOPIC 5 Strategic Comprehension

The basic comprehension strategies that children build out of oral language skills in kindergarten and first grade become more complex in second grade and beyond. As topics and text structures become less familiar and the goal of reading shifts from understanding familiar ideas to acquiring new information,

students must develop strategies for texts that extend beyond their own knowledge base.

TOPIC 6
Writing and Reading

Learning to write assists children in their reading; in learning to read, children also gain insights that help them as writers. But writing is more than an aid to learning to read; it is an important curricular goal. Through writing children express themselves, clarify their thinking, communicate ideas, and integrate new information into their knowledge base.

TOPIC 7
Engagement and Interest in Reading

From the earliest storybook reading with an adult and the first proudly scribbled message, children enjoy reading and writing because of the social communication and signs of cognitive competence the activities provide. The key to attaining and using literacy, even when sustained effort and attention are needed, is the sense of personal pride that children feel when they succeed.

TOPIC 8
School-Wide Reading Programs

In schools that are successful in fostering high levels of reading achievement, all adults in the school work together on the reading program, build systematic program links across the grades, accept responsibility for all children, and closely monitor students' progress.

Accomplishments for Early Reading

In order for children to be reading well by the end of third grade, their progress needs to be closely monitored during the preceding years.

Children cannot become competent readers overnight. *Every Child a Reader* uses the accomplishments from *Preventing Reading Difficulties*—statements about what children should know and be able to do that vary across grade levels—to help educators and families assess whether children are moving toward reading proficiency.

We chose to use this particular set of accomplishments rather than the standards, benchmarks, or accomplishments from other sources because *Preventing Reading Difficulties* attends directly to the accomplishments from year to year across the primary grades. In many of the frameworks of states¹⁰ and professional organizations,¹¹ accomplishments for the primary period are clustered into a single group. Such a clustering provides few guidelines for teachers. For teachers to be sensitive to children's reading progress, they need accomplishments that are as rich and varied as children's learning.

Each accomplishment is assigned to a grade level, and is intended as a marker along the road to competent reading, rather than an absolute indicator of a child's success or failure as a reader. Children can follow different timelines and pathways and still be accomplished readers by the end of third grade. If it seems that a child has not attained the accomplishments appropriate to his or her grade level, teachers and parents should discuss alternative ways to nurture the child's learning, rather than become discouraged or pessimistic about the child's progress.

The accomplishments that pertain to specific topics, such as writing or comprehension, appear in Topics 1–7, and the entire set can be found in Chapter 2

of *Preventing Reading Difficulties*. Also, many states and districts have developed their own “accomplishment” frameworks, and they can be used to guide the development of local programs and monitoring systems. The general point about any of these systems is that the teachers, administrators, parents, and policyworkers responsible for reading programs should develop a comprehensive framework for program implementation.

**EVERY CHILD A READER:
COMPANION READINGS**

Gaskins, I. (1998). There’s more to teaching at-risk and delayed readers than good reading instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 51, 534–547.

Harris, S. (1996). Bringing about change in reading instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 49, 612–618.

NOTES

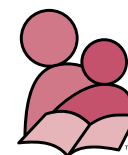
- ¹ Juel, C. (1988). Learning to read and write: A longitudinal study of fifty-four children from first through fourth grade. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80, 437–447.
- ² Campbell, J.R., Donahue, P.L., Reese, C.M., & Phillips, G.W. (1996). *NAEP 1994 reading report card for the nation and the states*. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
- ³ Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- ⁴ A booklet from *Preventing Reading Difficulties* has been prepared for family and community members and may be useful in the community outreach efforts of schools:
Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Starting out right: A guide to promoting children’s reading success*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- ⁵ Anderson, R.C., Hiebert, E.H., Scott, J.A., & Wilkinson, I.A.G. (1984). *Becoming a nation of readers: The report of the Commission on Reading*. Champaign-Urbana, IL: Center for the Study of Reading.
- ⁶ Adams, M.J. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- ⁷ See note 3 above.
- ⁸ Principal investigators of the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (1998). *Improving the reading achievement of America’s children: 10 research-based principles*. Ann Arbor, MI: Author.
- ⁹ Borman, G.D., & D’Agostino, J.V. (1996). Title I and student achievement: A meta-analysis of federal evaluation results. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 18, 309–326.
- ¹⁰ Wixson, K.K., & Dutro, E. (1998). *Standards for primary-grade reading: An analysis of state frameworks* (CIERA Report #3-001). Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement.
- ¹¹ International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English (1996). *Standards for the English language arts*. Newark, DE and Urbana, IL: Author.

This topic is part of the series *Every Child a Reader* by E.H. Hiebert, P.D. Pearson, B.M. Taylor, V. Richardson, & S.G. Paris of the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA).

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