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AUTHOR Binkley, Marilyn R.; And Others
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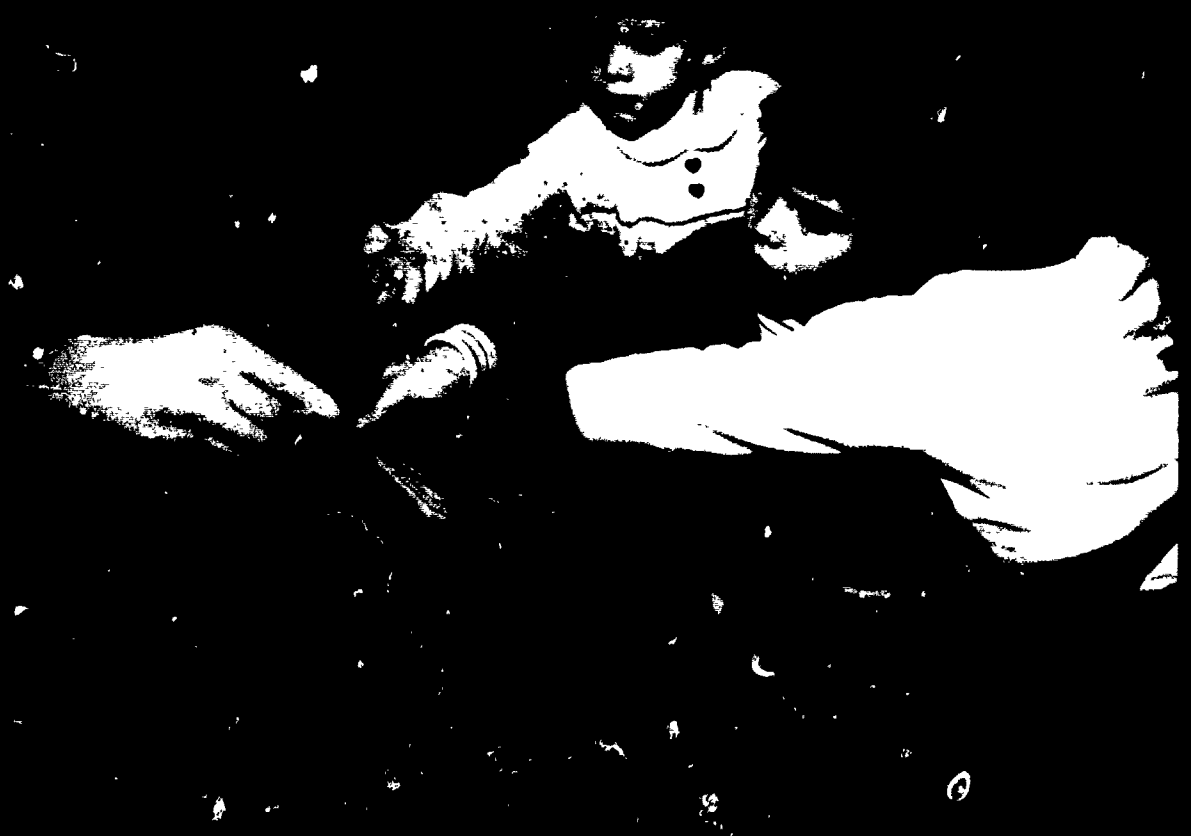
ABSTRACT

Intended to help principals with the design and implementation of reading instruction in their schools, the recommendations presented in this booklet are drawn directly from the findings discussed in "Becoming a Nation of Readers" in 1984. The conclusions of the Commission on Reading are described in ways that every principal can act upon. Taking the information that was laid out by the Commission, the booklet turns it into action plans that principals can use. The goal is to enhance reading instruction so that the "verified practices of the best teachers in the country can be introduced throughout the country." After a foreword by Barbara Bush and an introduction, the first section describes what a school that values literacy looks and feels like. The second section discusses what a principal should know about reading, while the third section considers what a principal can do to help create a community of readers. The final section identifies ways in which parents, teachers, textbook publishers, and schools can help children achieve their potentials as readers. Twenty-eight notes are included. (NKA)

Becoming a Nation of Readers

What Principals Can Do



Becoming a Nation of Readers

What Principals Can Do

Prepared by

Marilyn R. Binkley

With contributions from

Richard Ackerman
Robert E. Anastasi
Roland Barth
Gloria McDonell
Eugenia Nicholas
Bess Osburn
Neil J. Shipman
Margaret Smith-Burke
Harriet Tyson-Bernstein

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U.S. Department of Education
Lauro F. Cavazos
Secretary

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
Patricia M. Hines
Assistant Secretary

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Acting Director

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Foreword

by Barbara Bush

Every American child deserves a school that takes to heart its most challenging and important mission: to teach all students to read. The child who attends such a school is much more likely to become a productive and contributing adult—and a happier one, too. Reading is an essential tool for life, and one of its great joys. Our children must know how to do it.

As an ardent advocate for literacy, I am delighted to know that our educators have never been in a better position to help students learn to read. The research of the past fifteen years has taught us so much more about what is involved, starting with children's first exposure to reading and language. *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, released in 1985 by the Commission on Reading, enlightened us all by bringing together a wealth of information about what reading is and how reading instruction should proceed.

As that fine report pointed out, "Quality instruction involves many elements," and it also involves many people. Parents play the first influential role by laying the foundation for a lifetime of reading. Teachers complement and extend the work of parents by providing students with a rich array of experiences that develop language skills.

Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Principals Can Do speaks to the powerful influence of principals. Almost without exception, an excellent school has an outstanding principal who is deeply committed to helping children learn to read. This booklet is addressed to all principals who wish to make that commitment, and I strongly encourage you to consider its very sensible suggestions.

According to *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, "Reading, like playing a musical instrument, is not something that is mastered once and for all. Rather, it is a skill that continues to improve through practice." Principals can support this by creating an atmosphere where reading is clearly valued—by emphasizing the importance of reading and reading comprehension to staff, talking with students about books in classrooms and hallways, making sure that library and classrooms are well-stocked with good books, and regularly assessing youngsters' skills. This booklet describes these and many other ways that principals can be role models and leaders for good reading instruction in their schools.

These are enormous responsibilities, particularly when so much competes for a principal's energies. But there is nothing more important than teaching children to read—and read fluently. With the help of sound information like this booklet, principals can show us the way.

Barbara Bush

Acknowledgments

This booklet is the outgrowth of a long history of research in reading suported by the Department of Education. It draws heavily upon *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*. Therefore, my first debt is to all the members of the Commission who worked so diligently at reviewing and synthesizing the research on reading and practice.

I am also indebted to the contributors who brought many insights and perspectives to bear: They helped to make this booklet a better reflection of what is possible in schools. Gloria McDonell from the Fairfax County Public Schools, Bess Osburn of Sam Houston State University, and Margaret Smith-Burke of New York University contributed to the initial conceptualization and organization of the booklet, and provided working papers. Richard Ackerman, Eugenia Nicholas, and Roland Barth from the Harvard Principal's Center helped to formulate the picture of the literate school. Robert E. Anastasi and Neil J. Shipman from the National Association of Elementary School Principals helped describe the principal's responsibilities. And Harriet Tyson-Bernstein did her utmost to make this readable and enjoyable.

This publication was particularly exciting to me because of the cooperation from the National Association of Elementary School Principals and Houghton Mifflin Company, who have made it possible for us to print and widely distribute it. Both groups have very generously contributed their expertise and resources.

The Reading Commissioners remain involved. Dr. Isabel Beck, Professor and Senior Scientist at the University of Pittsburgh; Dr. Jeanne Chall, Professor and Director of the Reading Laboratory at Harvard University; Dr. Lenore Ringler, Professor at New York University; and Dr. Dorothy Strickland, Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, painstakingly reviewed drafts of this booket so that it would reflect the quality and balance achieved in the original. Their advice was invaluable.

Thanks for the frontline comments from Tina Thuermer of the Washington International School and Linda Goldberg from Fairfax County Public Schools and to the many members of the International Reading Association. John Ridley of Houghton Mifflin Company, Al Bursma of D. C Heath and Company, Blouke Carus of Open Court Publishing Company, and Shelley Moore of Addison-Wesley Publishing Company provided important editorial review.

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Contents

Introduction

The standards of literacy that sufficed a generation ago are no longer applicable today. Just being able to say the words printed on the page is insufficient. Parroting back what was read isn't enough either. A literate person must be able to read the words, to think about the ideas embodied in those words, to integrate ideas from many sources, and to use all those ideas to understand and resolve complex questions.

The reading research of the last ten to fifteen years has led to a major shift in our understanding and has given us a more unified picture of what reading is and what reading instruction should be like. While the best teachers have always known just how to combine the bits and pieces of instruction to create a good reading program, we can now describe those practices in ways that will help all teachers. We can articulate those understandings so that we can turn what once seemed like a mysterious art into a research-based craft.

This knowledge can have a major impact on your ability, as a principal, to lead and educate all students. In particular, it can guide your actions in designing and implementing reading instruction in your school. Drawn directly from the findings and recommendations presented in *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*, this booklet answers three questions important to principals:

- What does a school that values literacy look and feel like?
- What should a principal know about reading?
- What can a principal do to create a community of readers?

Throughout these pages, in example after example, the findings of the Commission are described in ways that you, the principal, can act on. The purpose of this booklet is to take the information that was laid out by the Commission and turn it into action plans that every principal can use. The goal is to enhance reading instruction so that the "verified practices of the best teachers in the best schools can be introduced throughout the country."[1]

What Does a School That Values Literacy Look and Feel Like?

A good school pulses with activity. Any visitor who enters the building forms an immediate impression about the school's values. The building speaks for itself and it is the school's best or worst public relations agent.

A walk down the halls of an imaginary "ideal school" will help you visualize what a school that values literacy looks and feels like.

The Halls

The first thing to meet your eye as you enter many schools is a mural or series of paintings and drawings by the students. It is clear that these schools value their students' products. In our ideal school, written messages accompany the artwork and tell the world that "Reading and writing are not confined to classrooms!" These messages, written by the students, are an invitation to visitors to join in the school's learning experiences by reading about what goes on here.

As you go through the building, every hallway extends the message that this school is a learning environment and that learning is a shared experience not limited to classrooms. A giant colorful calendar on the wall next to the auditorium describes the ongoing activities of every class. Next to the gym, each team has a bulletin board informing the entire school community about the ups and downs of the season. This school continually creates its own written history to accompany the ever-present oral one. Reading the sports history or the calendar is a vital school activity. Writing for these public message centers is not only legitimate but as important as the event itself.

The Library

The school library might just be the single most powerful transmitter of the value a school places on reading, writing, and student achievement. It, like the hallways, is a common space accessible and inviting to all. And this library contains exciting books appropriate for all the students in the school.

Because the library is such a friendly, well-organized resource, students walk in and use the books, the films, the materials. Sometimes they work in groups, sometimes in pairs, and sometimes alone. But all of them come to the library to work and to learn. The principal loves to come to read in the library because it is always full of students working on "finding out." The principal also takes the opportunity to talk to the librarian and aides to become familiar with the current needs and goals of the library program.

Ongoing Events

In this ideal school, reading is not always a solitary process. More often, it is a process of positive social interaction. The principal, librarian, teachers, and older students perpetuate the story-telling tradition by reading, acting out, tape-recording, or video-recording segments of books. The results of their labors are easily accessible in the library.

This school takes advantage of early adolescents' love of the dramatic by having them read aloud. Students happily practice reading for audiences. They act the roles of book characters with or without the benefit of special costumes or props. The size of the audience is not important; students share with each other, and students of all ages participate.

One happening, a *book talk*, is a fairly common event. Teachers, the librarian, the principal, and any willing adult will talk about the facts in a book, or their impressions of a book, during an impromptu lunchtime gathering with students. At the beginning of the year, it is more common to see adults leading the groups. But by the end of the year, the students will have taken over responsibility for organizing and leading the discussions. This school's faculty knows that talking about a book is just as important as reading it.

Because writing about books is also a powerful way to share, various places around the building are *book sharing centers*. The displays, titled "Have You Read?"

"If You Like Mysteries," and "Book of the Week," call students' attention to what is new as well as to all-time favorites. Outside the cafeteria, a *book menu*, changed weekly, features a particular genre, timely topic, or historical figure. The principal even writes a monthly book review for the school paper.

Inside Classrooms

The insides of classrooms tell the same very important story. Each classroom is filled with books. Not only are there textbooks, but the shelves are overflowing with trade books of every kind. These students read novels, poetry, history, science, social science, and mathematics. (And so do the teachers.) Each primary and middle school class has at least one subscription to a magazine, such as National Geographic's *World*, the National Federation of Wildlife's *Ranger Rick*, *The Electric Company*, or *Cricket*.

Each class also publishes its own monthly. Sometimes it looks like a newspaper, sometimes like a literary journal, and sometimes it's a scientific study. Every child contributes something. And each month, selections appear in the monthly newsletter to parents. If you look in the front office, you'll see the parents who help get it out!

As you enter each classroom, it's obvious that books are important. The classroom's displays entice children into reading. All the teachers can show you what their students are reading. The displays reinforce the reading strategies that have been taught. The principal supports the teachers' efforts by providing time —time for systematic instruction, time for group reading, and time when reading can be enjoyed without interruption. What a pleasure to hear a student say, "I'm reading this book very slowly because I never want it to end." Isn't that a powerful statement expressing love of reading?

The Principal as Role Model

In most schools, and to most students, the principal of the school is an enigma. This is especially true in schools that are large and complicated. In large schools, very few students ever have an opportunity to talk to their principal. But in this ideal school, the principal takes every opportunity in the hallways or in their classes to talk to students about books, telling them about great books and generally sharing literate concerns. Often this principal reads to students in the auditorium and in their classes. Each week the principal listens to four or five children read. When the principal makes announcements in the morning, they often include quotes from famous literary works.

This principal supports school-wide activities that recognize the value of reading. In September, there was a *read-a-thon*. The winners got copies of their favorite books. In November, just in time for holiday gift-giving, the parents and teachers helped the student council organize a *book fair*. The profits went to getting new books for the library. In January, the resource teachers helped the class presidents organize a *swap sale*—each child brought in an old favorite book and swapped it for someone else's. In March, the students went to press and each class published a *class anthology*. The stories, poems, and pictures were wonderful. Each month, at the assembly meetings, the principal either gave a speech kicking off an event or

proudly announced who had accomplished what. And so throughout the year, this principal reminded everyone how important and how valued reading and writing are.

Parents got the message too! From September on, and with each activity, parents were asked to participate. Parents were asked to make a nightly practice of reading with their children for at least twenty minutes. It didn't matter how old the children were. Parents were asked to come to school to read their favorite stories aloud. The monthly newsletter always included the principal's book review column. Each month, teachers took turns writing the annotated bibliography of the faculty's favorite books. Sometimes the list was aimed at parents sometimes at children.

All year, the message this school projected was consistent and strong: We are a community of readers. Some of the things the school did were simple and quickly done. Others involved time and expertise. Clearly, the principal didn't do it alone. Some parts were the principal's responsibility, but more importantly, other pieces were the ideas of members of the school team—teachers, parents, and students. Creating, leading, and supporting the team were the principal's primary responsibilities.

To create and support this type of literate environment, a principal must understand good reading instructional practices. The following pages present the essential information about reading research and practice that a principal needs.

What Should a Principal Know About Reading?

There are primarily three things a principal should know about reading:

- What is reading?
- What is good reading instruction?
- What is good assessment?

Once you have these fundamental ideas, you will have a framework for choosing programs and activities that will support your teachers in providing the best possible instruction.

What Is Reading?

The Commission on Reading defines reading as "the process of constructing meaning from written texts. It is a complex skill requiring the coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information."[2]

Becoming a Nation of Readers goes on to describe skilled reading in five ways:

- **Reading is a constructive process.** "Good readers skillfully integrate information in the text with what they already know."[3]
- **Reading must be fluent.** "Readers must be able to decode words quickly and accurately so that this process can coordinate fluidly with the process of constructing the meaning of the text."[4]
- **Reading must be strategic.** "Skilled readers are flexible. How they read depends upon the complexity of the text, their familiarity with the topic, and their purpose for reading."[5]
- **Reading requires motivation.** This is "one of the keys to learning to read."[6] Children come to recognize that reading can be interesting, useful, informative, and fun.
- **Skilled reading is a lifelong pursuit.** "Reading, like playing a musical instrument, is not something that is mastered once and for all at a certain age. Rather, it is a skill that continues to improve through practice."[7]

This view of reading leads to a rich notion of reading instruction that is broad in scope and adapted to a reader's level of development.

What Is Good Reading Instruction?

The Commission on Reading has divided development into two stages: emerging literacy and extending literacy. During emerging literacy, children take the critical first steps toward learning to read. As preschoolers at home, they learn to speak and reason and may be given their first experiences with books. At school, in kindergarten and first grade, they are systematically taught to read to a fair level of fluency.

During the extending literacy stage, children still have a great deal to learn about reading, even though most of them can decode words fluently and understand simple, well-written stories. At this time in their development, they are taught to use reading as a way to learn literature, science, and social studies.

Because beginning readers and developing readers tackle quite different tasks, their instruction should reflect those differences. The descriptions below take each stage in turn.

Emerging Literacy

It would be convenient for schools if entering children were equally ready to learn, but a class of kindergarten children is a ragtag group composed of the tall and the short, the quiet and the exuberant. A child's readiness for reading cannot be measured by the ability to hop and skip or to cut and paste. Rather, readiness for reading depends on the child's ability to speak and listen, to experience, understand, and talk about things, events, and ideas in his or her world. So the first

task of the school is to provide all of the children, but especially those with gaps in their experience, ample experiences, lots of books, and plenty of time to talk with the teacher and with each other about both experiences and books.

Emerging Literacy Instruction

Good emerging literacy instruction, in preschools and in kindergarten, includes many activities that immerse children in print environments. Examples of activities that foster the kind of development the Commission stresses include:

- **Daily story time.** Listening to a teacher read helps children develop important reading comprehension concepts. They learn to recognize the need for a beginning, middle, and end, to understand characters, conflict, and resolution—in short, the structure of stories. But listening is not enough. Children must be active participants who engage in discussion with their teacher and each other. When the children participate in discussion, they quickly learn to identify words and sentences, and they learn to make inferences about plots and characters.
- **Class collaborative stories.** As the teacher records, on chart paper or computer, stories dictated by the group, children learn about the conventions of language: words are composed of letters; reading goes from left to right. In the days that follow, when the children read back their stories, they begin to understand that print allows people to communicate across time and space. The stories are most effective when they are about shared experiences and when the children have an opportunity to discuss and argue about what should be written down. It helps if the children are given a chance to illustrate the story and preserve it in book form.
- **Daily individual writing experiences.** One of the most effective ways for children to learn about written language is to write. Writing activities (at this stage, not bound by conventions of spelling and penmanship) provide an important outlet for sharing experiences as well as a good way to apply and extend the children's knowledge of letter-sound relationships. Children can work alone, with an adult, with an older child—perhaps a helpful second- or third-grader, or in pairs. They should talk about their stories; they should "read" their stories and poems aloud; and they should be encouraged to write letters to friends and family.

Beginning Reading Instruction

Beginning reading instruction may start in kindergarten or in first grade, depending on the maturity and ability of the students. One of a child's major tasks at this stage of development is to learn how to translate groups of letters into spoken words. Indeed, fast and accurate word recognition is one of the cornerstones of skilled reading.[8]

- **Decoding**

The question is how best to teach children to decode words. "Most reading educators today [agree] that phonics instruction is one of the essential ingredients" for teaching word identification.[9] Reviewing the research, the Commission concluded that phonics instruction should start early and, for the most part, should finish by the end of second grade.

Phonics should be taught systematically and should be reflected in the materials the students read. Although researchers are still debating the best methods for phonics instruction, the goal is clear. Children should understand that there are systematic relationships between letters and sounds. It is not necessary for them to be able to "state the 'rules' governing letter-sound relationships."[10] Therefore, phonics instruction should target and teach the most important and regular letter-sound relationships. In this way, phonics can help beginning readers produce approximate pronunciations of words that may be checked against their own oral dictionaries.

Although phonics helps children become fast and accurate decoders, word-identification skills are not enough. In good reading programs, ample opportunities to read worthwhile material go hand in hand with word identification.

Good beginning reading instruction balances the need for reading material that has a limited vocabulary and the need to practice word identification with opportunities to hear interesting, exciting stories that use rich language. To do this, teachers may use pattern books or predictable stories, which repeat words and ideas, making it possible for children to recognize the recurring phrases. Not only do children enjoy reading this type of narrative; they can also play with language and expand their imaginative horizons as they conjure up new possibilities.

Teachers may also use assisted reading. Using this technique, the teacher first reads a word, phrase, or sentence aloud and asks the child to repeat it. Next, teacher and child read the material aloud in unison. Finally, the child rereads the passage without support from the teacher.

- **Writing**

Good beginning reading instruction also emphasizes children's efforts at writing. Teachers in the best classrooms encourage children to write using invented spellings so they can express their ideas and at the same time rely on what they know about letter-sound correspondences. For example, when asked to write a story, one first-grader wrote:

"The Wrlds Gradts Dog
My dog Teena and my fends dog Roobe aer vary nis dogs Oan day a ltl gril fal in the wote Rooby and Teena savt are."

(The World's Greatest Dog
My dog Tina and my friend's dog Ruby are very nice dogs. One day a little girl fell in the water. Ruby and Tina saved her.)[11]

In conveying her ideas, this child focused first on beginning and ending consonants. But as parents and friends asked her, "What does this say?" she eagerly worked at refining her spelling so that it could be read easily. Her knowledge of letter-sound relationships was acquired because of the need and desire to communicate, instead of being learned through endless dull drill.

- **Comprehension Instruction**

Comprehension instruction is also a major part of good beginning reading programs. The mainstay of comprehension instruction is the small-group reading lesson, which most often takes the form of the directed reading activity. In general, this format has three phases: preparation, reading, and discussion.

Although the **preparation phase** of reading instruction is known to improve comprehension, classroom observation has shown that this part of the lesson is most often skipped. However, when teachers use instructional time to build essential background knowledge, students focus their attention on the important aspects of their reading.

The best teachers build background knowledge by using activities that "focus on the concepts that will be central to understanding the upcoming story, concepts that children either do not possess or may not think of without prompting."[12] Well done, the activity provides students with a framework that helps them interrelate events and concepts, and thus makes the story more memorable.

Asking questions that highlight the story's theme is a particularly good way of building background. These questions draw the students' attention to the important aspects of an upcoming story. For example, the following activity from one developmental reading program is a good model for setting direction. The story is about three brothers who, while searching for a tangible treasure, find a far greater treasure in the form of achievement and the respect and admiration of the community. The teacher is directed to carry out the following discussion:

"Tell students that the next story they will read, 'The Buried Treasure,' is a Russian folktale about three brothers who dig for one buried treasure and discover another kind of treasure.

"Prepare a 'treasure chest' to place on a desk or tabletop in front of the class. You might want to decorate a large box, or use a real chest. Encourage students to guess what kind of treasure is 'hidden' in the chest. Have them share their ideas of what they think the treasure might be, as well as what they wish it would be.

"Conduct a discussion about the word *treasure* by asking students to think about other kinds of treasures, ones that cannot be hidden in a treasure chest. Encourage them to tell abut something they consider a treasure or something valuable to them. Have students recall any stories or folktales that they remember which involved some kind of treasure. You might want to suggest intangible treasures such as friendship. Discuss with students how and why a friendship can be a treasure."[13]

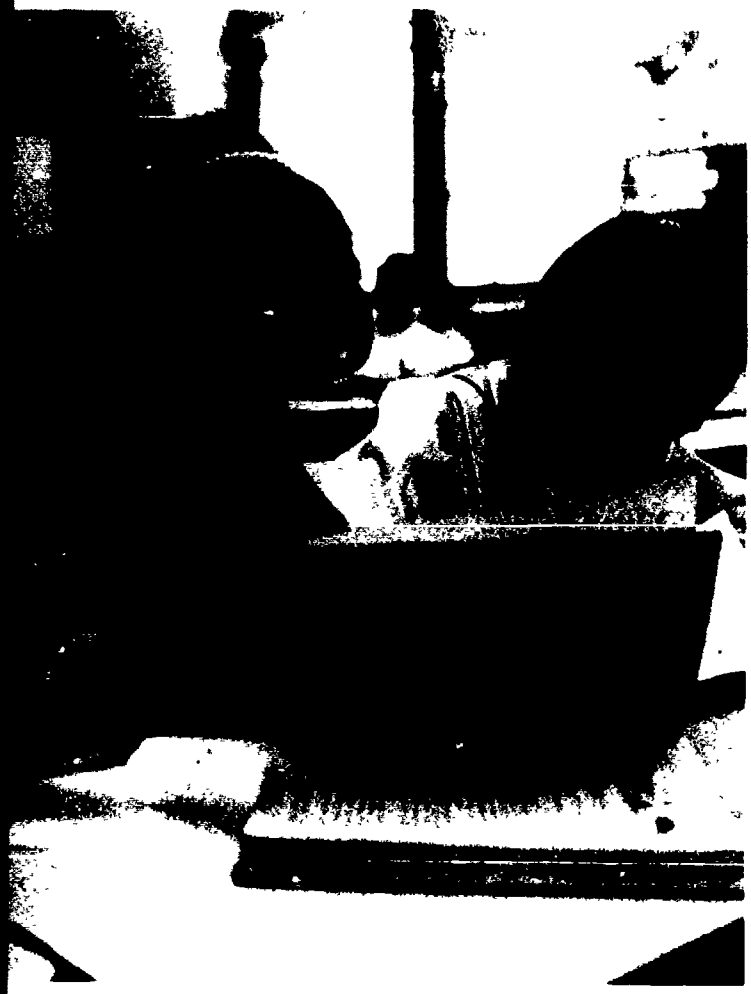
Within the **reading phase**, time for extended silent reading is essential. In fact, the Commission on Reading recommends that by the time children are in the third or fourth grade, they should read independently for a minimum of two hours per week. In the best classrooms, children are often engaged in uninterrupted extended reading, even from the first grade on.

The reading stage should also include oral reading. Although the standard practice of round-robin reading may ensure that everyone gets a turn to read, the Commission recommends that students practice the selection silently before reading aloud and that students repeatedly read the same selection until an acceptable level of fluency is attained.

Recent research has had the greatest impact on the **discussion phase** of the directed reading lesson. Typically, this phase would include discussion of the entire story.

One of the best ways for teachers to improve children's understanding is to ask questions that lead children to integrate central points of a selection with information they already know. Well-crafted questions are generally open-ended, have no single right answer, and require students to tie many pieces of information together.

Independent practice is also an important follow-up to the directed reading activity. Unfortunately, in a majority of classrooms workbooks and skill sheets may take up to 70 percent of the time allocated for reading instruction. Many of these materials, however, require only a perfunctory kind of reading, seldom require that children draw conclusions or read on a high level, require no extended writing, and drill students on skills that have little value in learning to read.[14]



Teachers have typically used workbooks and skill sheets as ways to manage their classes: as the teacher worked with one group, the other children worked on workbook assignments. The best teachers, however, have students work on meaningful activities that are related to the story just read and that meet the following criteria:

- Students can work either independently or in groups. Working cooperatively helps students articulate the reasons for their answers.
- The reading activities use meaningful units of text. Reading a story for example, is more meaningful than reading isolated sentences.
- The writing activities require children to communicate complete messages, such as a personal response to a story that has been read, or a letter to the author.

Extending Literacy

As mentioned before, in the extending literacy phase, children still have a great deal to learn about reading even though they can decode words fluently and can understand simple, well-written stories. The focus at this stage shifts to teaching children to use reading as a tool for learning literature, science, and social studies. Three factors influence the quality of instruction at this stage: First, students must have well-written, interesting books to read. Second, teachers must provide good instruction. And third, students must have opportunities for meaningful practice.

Choosing Textbooks

In the ongoing debate over how textbooks are chosen, particular concerns center on the level of difficulty, clarity, coherence, depth of coverage, and accuracy of these materials. Ideally, the difficulty level of the material would be matched to the ability level of the intended audience. However, determining how well matched materials are to children may be quite difficult.

Attempts to match books to children's ability levels have often included the use of readability formulas. However, readability formulas do not measure or examine a number of vital aspects of text. For example, they do not measure whether the text is well-written and has a logical structure that students can follow.

Because of these concerns, the Commission advocates using readability formulas only as a "first check on the difficulty and appropriateness of books."[15] It is more important to check the book's organization, appeal, literary quality, and subject-matter accuracy. To do this, teachers must be given adequate time to review and evaluate materials in relation to their classes' needs and abilities.

Providing Good Instruction

As the Commission points out, "research has shown that children's learning is facilitated when critical concepts or skills are directly taught."[16] Essentially, this means that students should be taught strategies that focus their attention on the relevant information, help them synthesize that information, and integrate it with what they already know.

This instruction may take the form of teachers' demonstrating how they themselves go about understanding a passage. Not only do good teachers provide "how to" information; they also include information on why and when to use the strategy. Examples of approaches that encourage direct instruction in comprehension strategies include "reciprocal teaching" and "informed strategies for learning."

- In **reciprocal teaching**, the teacher first teaches the students to monitor their understanding by devising questions about the passage, summarizing it, predicting what will follow, and resolving inconsistencies in it. Then each student takes the role of the teacher by asking other children questions about the text. In this way, students adopt the roles and cognitive activities of teachers as they monitor each other's and their own comprehension of the text.[17]

- In **informed strategies for learning**, students are taught *how* to use such strategies as skimming, *why* the strategies are helpful, and *when* to use them. Teachers reinforce the importance of these strategies by using such metaphors as "Be a Reading Detective" and "Road Signs for Reading" to help students visualize the tasks. Students meet in groups so they can actively participate in dialogues and express their views while listening to peers.[18]

Reading and thinking strategies are taught more appropriately while students are studying literature, science, or social studies than in separate reading lessons. When students learn specific strategies in relation to a particular content area, they see how useful that strategy is in helping them to grapple with important but unfamiliar content.[19]

Providing Meaningful Practice

To truly learn a skill, students must understand and practice it until they have made it their own. Generally, skills practice is included as part of a reading lesson. Practice materials that focus on a single skill can help students perfect that skill. However, practice should not be limited to single-purpose materials. Students also need opportunities to practice the act of reading as a whole.

Regrettably, the typical elementary school class spends less than 10 percent of its total reading instruction time on independent silent reading.[20] Because research has consistently shown that there is a direct relation between the amount of time students spend reading and their vocabulary growth, reading fluency, and overall achievement, it is imperative that schools provide sufficient time for students to read a variety of materials.

The best teachers and schools make certain that students have ready access to books, whether in the classroom or in the school library. The teachers include activities to interest children in books, and they set aside class time for independent reading in their weekly schedules. In these good classes, it is not unusual to see children just reading on their own.

Similarly, children must also have time to write. Research has established a powerful relationship between the opportunity to write and the ability to read. However, practice materials that ask students to write no more than a word, phrase, or sentence are inadequate. Children should write extended compositions, because writing of this kind provides opportunities for children to think about and choose their own topics, organize the information they wish to present, and communicate effectively with their readers.

The following writing activities give students an opportunity to share and reflect in writing as they learn and grow.

- **Dialogue journals** are just what their name says—personal records of the dialogue between two people. When used in schools, dialogue journals allow student and teacher to communicate in a meaningful way. The student writes about whatever he or she is interested in, and the teacher shares comments, reactions, questions, and thoughts while providing a writing model. The teacher's response contains no revision or evaluation of what the student has written and avoids comments on topics parents might find sensitive and private.
- **Learning logs** use the format of a dialogue journal to help students reflect on what they have learned. The goal is not to repeat what the book or teacher said. Rather, the student is expected to connect new material with previously learned material. Teacher-assigned questions can be used to guide students to focus on a specific instructional objective or learning experience.
- **Student author programs**, which give students the opportunity to write for "publication," are one of the most exciting ways to get children to read and write. Effective ways of stimulating this activity include forming a *drop-in publishing center* where parent volunteers, teacher aides, or both, help students illustrate, duplicate, and publish final copies of their work, and convening a *young author's conference* where students come together to share what they have written and to discuss the writing process author to author.

A salient feature of good classroom instruction is the active involvement of all students in reading, writing, and talking about interesting curricular topics. Students have ideas, problems, and interests they wish to pursue through reading and writing and oral communication. They plan activities, carry out their ideas, and, in the process, expand their reading and writing abilities.

What Is Good Assessment?

The public, policymakers, and school personnel, at state, local, and national levels, are all concerned about illiteracy. This concern is often translated into a strong desire for increased accountability that results in a seemingly never-ending series of tests that students must take. In most schools across the nation, children are subjected to a statewide reading test, a districtwide reading test, a school-level test, and periodic, end-of-unit basal tests.

Although well intentioned, too much testing may have some negative side effects. Time devoted to evaluation not only includes the actual time spent during the test, but also the hours spent preparing students to take these exams. Consequently, a great deal

of time that might otherwise be devoted to instruction is lost.

This erosion of instructional time raises serious questions. First, how well do tests assess reading? How useful are the results? Second, which tests are most appropriate for evaluating district or school reading programs? How many students must participate? Third, which assessment procedures are the most effective for planning instruction? Finally, is all the testing necessary, and what do parents really want to know about a child's reading and writing?

How Well Do Tests Assess Reading?

There are two major types of tests used in school districts across the country: norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests. Usually, norm-referenced tests consist of comprehension, vocabulary, and a few other subtests. Primarily designed to enable comparisons, these tests assist school personnel in understanding how well groups of children are doing in relation to others. They provide only minimal data about the children's ability to use reading and writing for a variety of purposes. On the other hand, criterion-referenced tests assess mastery of a set of reading subskills, assisting school personnel and parents to evaluate whether each individual child has mastered these reading subskills.

Neither kind of test is perfect. Researchers and test developers recognize and are trying to correct the following flaws:

- Neither type effectively accounts for differences in children's prior reading and speaking vocabularies, which can have an impact on performance.
- The tests do not measure all aspects of reading performance. Therefore, they provide a limited picture of students' abilities.
- The passages and tasks that are often included in the tests do not always reflect what readers actually do. Researchers prefer more accurate measures of reading processes.

The Commission advocates the development of more comprehensive assessments of reading and writing that reflect the ultimate goals of reading instruction.[21] But this is a long-term goal. In the meantime, there are actions principals and district administrators should consider.

Program Evaluation: Which Testing Procedures Are Optimal?

In evaluating a reading program administrators should select broad-gauged measures that allow for comparisons across schools. Currently, the only evaluation tools that attempt to do this, however imperfectly, are norm-referenced tests. If these tests are selected for evaluation purposes, it is critical that administrators continue to work with test publishers to develop new evaluation measures that are consistent with recent research about reading.

Administrators should also consider alternative ways of gathering information about the effectiveness of their reading program. For example, they may consider using anecdotal data that would provide qualitative descriptors of programs in action.

Because test time is "off-task" and costly when testing all students, it makes both financial and educational sense to use a stratified random sample of children within the district or school instead of the entire population for program evaluation. California, for example, uses these procedures when evaluating statewide progress. The National Assessment of Educational Progress uses similar sampling procedures in its assessment programs as well.

Which Assessment Procedures Should Guide Classroom Instruction?

To guide instruction effectively, assessment must occur on an ongoing basis so that the information gained can be used *immediately* to shape instruction. Although criterion-referenced tests could be used, they often lead to an overemphasis on the mastery of isolated skills, foster reading instruction that does not

stress the integrated act of reading, and consume teachers' time with paperwork rather than teaching.

Ongoing, informal observation by the classroom teacher is an effective and inexpensive alternative to formal testing. By continuously observing students' strategies as they engage in meaningful reading and writing tasks, by analyzing the products of these tasks, and by getting students to evaluate their own progress, teachers acquire necessary information to plan instruction sensitive to individual needs.

Commission members suggest having teachers ascertain whether students can do the following things: read grade-appropriate material aloud with acceptable fluency; write satisfactory summaries of selections from social studies and science textbooks; explain the plots and the motivations of characters in fiction; and read extensively from books, magazines, and newspapers during leisure time.

Since reading itself is an "invisible" mental activity, it can only be monitored through observation of oral language use or writing. Therefore, informal reading measures need to include a wide variety of tasks such as discussion, drama, artistic representation, interviews, and writing. Records of student performances can be compiled through informal reading inventories, writing portfolios, tape recordings of periodic oral readings, personal readings lists, and student reviews of books.

What Do Parents Want to Know?

Parents are generally concerned about two things: "How well is my child doing?" and "What are my child's strengths and weaknesses?" In the best of situations, they will also ask, "What can I do to help?" If teachers follow the recommendations of the Commission and periodically have students perform the tasks described above, they will have comparative performance information that goes beyond percentile and grade-equivalent scores. This information will allow teachers to discuss student performance on the kinds of reading and writing activities that make sense to parents.

In addition, if teachers record ongoing observations of classroom performance, keep folders of each student's writing, and keep lists of the books the student has read, they can effectively show parents examples of their child's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers can even make suggestions to parents about how to help, because specific information about what each child can do will be available.

Informal testing and observation not only provide teachers with diagnostic information but also help parents realistically understand their children's literacy abilities. This type of informal assessment, which addresses parents' concerns, lessens the need for formal, standardized testing.

What Can a Principal Do to Create a Community of Readers?

In the following pages, we describe actions principals can take that will create an ideal environment for reading, writing, and learning. No doubt you are doing some of the things we will suggest. The idea is to keep building on your successes and to make each new activity part of the recurring yearly routine at your school.

As the key person between the school, the district, and the community, the principal is clearly responsible for getting as many resources into the school as possible. Inside the building, the principal is also responsible for the equitable distribution of those resources, which include human resources, books, instructional supplies, and materials.

Working with the School

Staffing

The staff is perhaps the most critical resource. The principal must begin by ensuring that the school is assigned as many appropriately qualified teachers as necessary to meet the needs of the school population. Not only is it important to have an adequate number of classroom teachers; it is also important to have appropriate resource personnel. The resource professionals are crucial for within-building staff development and leadership, and the resource team should clearly include a reading specialist who works with teachers and students to model good instruction.

Creating an instructional leadership team is another crucial step. It would be unreasonable to expect that a principal could be expert in every area of the curriculum. But it is reasonable to expect that every area of the curriculum will have its advocate and expert in any given school building. In addition to the curricular experts, some schools' instructional leadership teams include representatives from each grade level. The team's responsibilities may include creating policy as well as identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the school. Managing the school's reading program is often part of this cooperative effort among staff and principal.

Staff Development

An additional resource the principal must provide is training. A well-thought-out, purposeful inservice program is crucial to making a school effective. Too often, principals overlook the resources close at hand in favor of experts from outside. Often the best training can be provided through problem-solving sessions with the existing faculty. The principal can arrange the schedule to free teachers to plan and work together. Giving a teacher time to observe a colleague's class and then to sit down and discuss what happened in that class is a powerful tool for changing and improving instruction.

Creating teaching teams goes a long way in fostering sharing among teachers and is a great boost to professional growth. Team teaching, especially when it includes collaborative planning, is particularly effective. The use of teaching teams may make it possible to group students in innovative ways. With input from the principal and the instructional leadership team, groups of teaching teams might consider the pros and cons of various grouping patterns for meeting the instructional needs of their students.

A Shared Vision

A principal must have a vision for the school which is reflected in a well-articulated philosophy of education that is shared by the faculty and community. This vision should be shared during interviews with prospective staff and during parent conferences. At the beginning of each school year, the best principals take the time to talk to their faculties in detail about that vision and the goals for the year. Then the best principals let their faculties take over from there—the teachers and staff determine what actions they should take to meet those goals, who will be responsible, what resources are necessary, and how the results will be

evaluated. By doing so, the principal will have empowered teachers to be professionals. The principal will have take . risks and will allow and encourage teachers to take risks as well.

The principal must also serve as a model for faculty and students. In the description of our ideal school, the principal could clearly be described as a literate person: one who reads aloud with students, writes book reviews, is seen reading and researching in the school library, and is obviously well-read. The best principals also subscribe to and read professional newspapers and journals. When they find timely articles, they make sure all interested faculty members get copies and they take the time to follow up by asking the faculty what they thought about the articles, asking whether the ideas would be appropriate in this school, asking how the teachers would apply them if they could.

Working with the District

In addition to knowing about new professional developments, the principal must know the district inside out. The best principals know who controls the "purse strings" for money, supplies, books, or even procedures. The best principals know how to get things done in the district, even when there is no money. If there aren't any funds for new library acquisitions, these principals know how to make it easy for teachers to borrow materials—books, films, computer hardware and software—from the public library. They also know where all surplus old books are. If push comes to shove, good teachers know how to take discontinued textbooks apart and select the best stories for enrichment. The best principals know who to call to make it possible for the children in their school to use electronic mail and to write to students at the other end of town or across the continent. But above all else, the best principals know how to involve the parents and community in their schools.

Working with Parents

Parents play an enduring and crucial role in their children's development. If you can win their support, all in the school community—children, teachers, administrators—gain. Winning parents over is really not that hard if you can answer their concerns in ways they understand. Their first concern is to understand the school's program. Then they want to know how their children are doing. Next, they are interested in knowing how they can effectively help their children. And finally, if they are comfortable and feel like part of the community, they will actively participate in school-based activities. In the following pages, we describe how to get parents involved by just modifying some of the old standard school meetings and by being somewhat more creative than you may have previously been.

Describing the Reading Program

Beginning with the orientation meeting (often called back-to-school night) in the fall, through parent-teacher conferences at the end of at least two marking periods, right through children's year-end performances, there are a number of standard times when parents are likely to be in the building. To get parents involved in what is going on, you must convince them that they are part of the team and that their child's progress depends as much on them as on the instruction provided in classes.

At back-to-school night, you can describe the school's reading and writing program in words that anyone can understand. The trick to this is to make it clear that ultimately all children can learn to read. What differs among programs is how children will get there. Do your teachers prefer one approach over another? In what situations? Does the district mandate a particular basal? Is there continuity across the grades? Why?

Just saying "We focus on comprehension," "We teach phonics," or "We use an eclectic approach" is really insufficient. Parents need to know what those terms mean and why the school has adopted its approach. The most informed speaker would probably be the reading resource teacher. By sharing the podium with faculty members, you would be emphasizing your team policy. The reading resource teacher could easily give examples of a variety of techniques. The examples would make the words more meaningful. Playing videotapes of teachers teaching model lessons at various grade levels would provide a vivid image of what goes on in the school. Breaking up into class-size groups and giving parents an opportunity to look at the materials their children use would be very helpful as well. This is especially true if each classroom teacher points out the characteristic features of the program.

Providing a short brochure that describes the reading and writing program at the end of the meeting would give parents something to refer to as they think about the presentation. Further description and reference to particular activities should appear in subsequent newsletters.

Helping Parents Understand How Their Children Are Doing

By the time parent conferences at the end of the first marking period come around, parents will be able to come to the meeting with some understanding of the program. If they have been monitoring their child's progress at home, it is very likely that they will have specific questions. In addition, they will have some

common language to use in talking to their child's teacher. The teacher will be able to tap the parents' knowledge of the program when explaining how their child is progressing.

In addition to report cards, many schools send home the results of standardized tests. Even if these results are accompanied by some explanatory material, you can be relatively sure that most parents don't really understand what the results mean.

Some schools hold a special parent meeting where the purpose, procedures, interpretation, and limitations of standardized tests are explained. Once they have participated in that group meeting, parents then individually meet with their child's teacher to discuss the child's test results and the uses of this information. While this may seem like making a mountain out of a molehill, for many parents it is essential. In districts where the comparative standardized test results are reported in the newspaper, it is even more important that parents truly understand and have an opportunity to discuss their child's test scores.

Throughout these meetings, the school faculty is sending two powerful messages. First, they are demonstrating that the members of the faculty know what they are doing and that they can talk about it in ways that everyone can understand. And second, they are showing that the faculty works as a team, and they want more people—especially parents—on the team.

Helping Parents Work with Their Children at Home

Once parents understand what their children are expected to do in school and they understand how well their children are doing (or are not doing), they often really want to know how to help. Too often, schools put them off by making schooling something only "experts" can do. Actually, parents can play a very supportive role without taking over the teacher's job.

As described in the booklet *Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Parents Can Do*, which you may want to distribute to every family, there are a number of things parents can do that would complement and support the school's efforts. Providing parents with some guidelines and directions on what they can do goes a long way. You could suggest that parents do some of the following things:

- **Parents should read with and talk with their children.** Since reading instruction builds on oral language, children need as many opportunities as possible to talk and reason with adults. Stress the importance of asking children questions that require more than a yes or no response, that require them to reason and organize information.

  Similarly, it is very important for children to read with adults. Not only should parents read to their children, but as children learn to read they should be given a chance to read to their parents.

  Parents will welcome suggestions on how to choose books, how to read to their children, what to do when their children make mistakes, and how to effectively support and encourage their children's growth as readers.

- **Parents should provide ample opportunities for reading and writing at home.** Parents can support children's efforts by taking them to the library to choose books to read for pleasure or to get books for research projects. Help parents understand the importance of the nightly ritual of reading together. A family reading hour, where all members of the family take the time to sit down and read what they want, goes a long way.

  In addition, parents can help get children writing just by making sure that pencils, pens, crayons, markers, and paper are readily available. If children are encouraged to write letters, they are likely to get letters. Parents can help children keep a journal or can encourage their children to write stories. If the school provides guidelines, parents are more likely to take that all-important first step.

- **Parents should monitor their children's television viewing.** Most parents are very concerned about how much television children should watch. Guidelines suggesting that children watch no more than ten hours of television a week, and that parents watch and discuss those shows with their children, would go a long way in improving children's oral

language and reading because there would be more time for reading at home.

- **Parents should coach their children as a way of helping with homework.** All too often, when parents help with homework, they wind up doing the homework for their children. Needless to say, no one benefits in a situation like that. Parents need to understand that homework is not the time for children to learn something new. Rather, it is the time for them to practice what they have already learned in school.

  Parents are not supposed to teach or tutor their children while they do homework. Instead, they should act as a coach by getting their children to talk through the assignment. Parents should listen while children explain their answers and how they got those answers.

Even just a fact sheet telling parents where to go for information on how to help their children would be helpful. But if the goal is to get parents actively involved in the school, there are more creative steps that are more likely to bring parents into the building.

Getting Parents to Help in School

The trick to getting parents involved in school activities is to structure the activities so that everyone knows just what to expect. If you start off the school year with an interesting event, parents will be more likely to continue coming. One principal and the entire school faculty organized a unit on immigration that included a simulation of arriving at Ellis Island. All the students had researched where their families had come from, they had studied about immigration, and then they pretended they were from that country. Imagine how the parents felt when they pretended that they were the immigration agents processing children through Ellis Island during the great waves of immigration. Needless to say, those students will have a vivid sense of the hardships and courage that were part of getting to the United States.

But schooling is more than the special event; it is the day-to-day business of teaching and learning. You want parents to understand and be involved in that, too. So you need to get them to come again and again. Only then will they have a true picture of what the school values.

The following are some ways to encourage parents to become active and valuable partners in their children's schooling.

- **Having a parents' section in the school library** would be a good way to get parents into the building. This section could include books on how and what to read to children, information on special programs available in the area, child-rearing suggestions, as well as appropriate parents' magazines and newsletters. Because, as the old saying goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words," you and your faculty might want to produce your own videotapes demonstrating how parents can help their children with selected activities at home. Parents could check these out and could view them at home.
- **Consider having a family night**—a variation of the traditional "back-to-school night." Instead of just the parents coming to school, during family night children and parents come together. They participate in the activities together. In addition to seeing some things that normally occur during the school day, they could observe some special story readings or project presentations. Parents could see how the teacher teaches and also be shown a model of activities they could be doing at home with their children.
- **Teachers, especially beginning teachers, thrive on "make-and-take" workshops. Parents do too!** A series of workshops that give parents an opportunity to learn how to create activities that they can take home and use with their children during the

weekend is likely to be a big hit. Before long, parents could be swapping ideas of their own.

- **Setting up small discussion groups** with selected members of your faculty acting as facilitators works especially well with parents of children who are having difficulty in school. By involving these parents in discussions with others having similar problems and with reading specialists, you will accomplish a number of goals. First, parents will recognize that they are not alone and that their situation is not that unusual. Second, you may help them find the resources they may need in getting their child the necessary help. And finally, your faculty will have an opportunity to help parents shape appropriate strategies for dealing with their child's problems.

Bringing **volunteers** into the school building serves a number of important purposes. For example, it gets the school extra help that can free teachers for teaching and staff development. It can convince the community that good things are happening: a parent who sees something exciting is sure to talk about it with neighbors, colleagues, and other parents. And teachers will have an opportunity to indirectly model activities parents can do with their children.

If you bring volunteers in on a regular basis, it is important that you plan ahead. You should consider having a coordinator who would take requests from teachers and would match and train parents to do the requested tasks. Embedded in that simple sentence are some important issues. Your staff would need to know what tasks are reasonable. They would need to know how to provide instructions at the appropriate level of specificity, and they would need to know how to follow up after the tasks are accomplished. Similarly, the volunteers would need to know what is expected of them. They should have access to someone who could answer their questions. And they should, above all else, understand the importance of confidentiality.

There are a number of tasks that parents are particularly good at doing. For example:

- **Accompanying a class on a field trip** is the classic use of parent volunteers. Too often, parents just tag along because they have not been told what to do or to expect. A fact sheet sent home a few days before the trip with an outline of responsibilities—such as a description of expected routines or the names of particular children this parent is responsible for—is a big help. It also helps to explain the purpose of the trip, noting what the teacher expects the children to get out of it and to include a few suggestions on how the parent could participate. On a trip to the library, parents could help children find books, pamphlets, and video materials if they have had an opportunity to "scout it out" beforehand.

- **Tapping the particular talents of parents during enrichment periods** is also common. Remember the parents who sew: they could come in and help children make costumes for the class play. Or the parents who have been all around the world: they could show their slides of the places the children are studying. Did the parents or grandparents immigrate? They could describe their experiences getting to the United States. Or parents could describe their work. Does someone work for the local newspaper? That person could help the students publish their own newspaper. No doubt you can generate your own list of the special things your students' parents can do.

- **The school can always use storytellers.** With a little training from the librarian or reading resource teacher, and some practice, most parents can either tell stories or read stories to children. If the coordinator or class teacher has helped to choose the story beforehand, the parents will be well on their way.

- **Parent volunteers can run the publishing center.** Children get a real kick out of publishing their books. With just a little training, parents could help children illustrate, type, and bind their manuscripts. Your young authors would have another very appreciative audience as well.

- **Parents can run the book fair and swap sale.** They can unpack the books, catalogue the orders, and help repack the leftovers. If they have had an opportunity to preview the books before the event, they can even help students make selections.

- **Get parents to write an occasional column for the school newsletter.** Once parents are involved in the school, they will have a great deal to say about what is happening at school. They'll also be great at running the paper off and distributing it—not only to parents who have children in the school, but also to local business people, senior citizens, and anyone in the community who might be interested. They may ultimately take the whole process over and run it for you.

Clearly, a principal cannot be in all places all the time. Principals must delegate responsibility. By involving the community of faculty, parents, and students as early and as often as possible, you will ensure that many of these suggested actions will become part of the school culture.

What Are the Next Steps?

"The more elements of good parenting, good teaching, and good schooling children experience, the greater the likelihood that they will achieve their potential as readers."[22]

The Commission on Reading critically reviewed the great mass of research and theory on beginning reading and language comprehension. Their report translates this vast research into ways to improve instruction for all children.[23] Only a small part of its wealth of information is covered in these pages.

Becoming a Nation of Readers calls upon us all to actively participate in creating a literate society. Parents, teachers, school personnel, and policymakers have different but very complementary roles in helping us reach that goal.

Becoming a Nation of Readers calls upon parents to help "in laying the foundation for learning to read. Parents should informally teach preschool children about reading and writing by reading aloud to them, discussing stories and events, encouraging them to learn letters and words, and teaching them about the world around them.... In addition to laying a foundation, parents need to facilitate the growth of their children's reading by taking them to libraries, encouraging reading as a free-time activity, and supporting homework."[24]

Becoming a Nation of Readers asks that teachers

- maintain classrooms that are both stimulating and disciplined,
- present well-designed phonics instruction when teaching beginning reading,
- devote more time to comprehension instruction, and assign fewer workbooks and skill sheets, and
- structure lessons so that students spend more time in independent reading and writing.[25]

Becoming a Nation of Readers calls for publishers to publish

- reading primers that are interesting, comprehensible, and give children opportunities to apply phonics, and
- textbooks that contain adequate explanations of important concepts.[26]

Becoming a Nation of Readers asks that schools do the following:

- provide "preschool and kindergarten reading readiness programs [that] focus on reading, writing, and oral language,"
- cultivate an ethos that supports reading,
- maintain well-stocked and managed libraries,
- introduce more comprehensive assessments of reading and writing,
- attract and hold more able teachers, and
- provide for the continuing professional development of teachers.[27]

Finally, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* calls for lengthening and improving teacher education programs.[28]

The full report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, provides the larger perspective by describing how teachers, principals, and communities can make our nation a nation of readers.

To order the full report, see the ordering information at the back of this booklet.

Notes

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Ordering Information

For additional copies of this booklet, *Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Principals Can Do*, write to National Association of Elementary School Principals, Educational Products Center, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3483. Single copies are $2.00 per copy. When ordering 3 to 10 copies, add $2.00 for postage; when ordering more than 10 copies, add 10 percent to the price of the booklets. Make check or money order payable to NAESP.

To order the full report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading*, write to Becoming a Nation of Readers, P.O. Box 2774, Station A, Champaign, IL 61820-8774. Single copies (up to 50) are $4.50 per copy. Boxes of 50 copies are $150.00 per box. Illinois residents add 6 percent sales tax. For overseas mailing add $1.00 per copy. Make check or money order payable to University of Illinois—BNR.

To order the booklet *Becoming a Nation of Readers: Implications for Teachers*, write to Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402-9371. Send $1.50 per copy and refer to stock number 065-000-00260-4.

For single copies of the booklet *Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Parents Can Do*, write to What Parents Can Do, Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, CO 81009. Send 50¢ per copy. For packages of 10 copies, write to D. C. Heath and Company, Distribution Center, 2700 North Richardt Avenue, Indianapolis, IN 46219. Send $5.00 per package and refer to ISBN code number 19500-6.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION NEWS

**CAVAZOS ISSUES BOOKLET TO HELP
PRINCIPALS IMPROVE READING INSTRUCTION**

ATLANTA, April 15, 1989 -- U.S. Education Secretary Lauro F. Cavazos today released Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Principals Can Do, a guide to help school principals improve the quality of reading instruction in their schools.

"Creating an environment that values literacy," Cavazos said, "begins with the principal -- the instructional leader of the entire school community. This booklet will help principals create schools where good reading practices flourish and all members of the school team -- students, teachers, parents, and staff -- are involved in reading activities."

In the booklet's foreword, literacy advocate and First Lady Barbara Bush wrote, "Almost without exception, an excellent school has an outstanding principal who is deeply committed to helping children learn to read. This booklet is addressed to all principals who wish to make that commitment, and I strongly encourage you to consider its very sensible suggestions."

The new booklet was developed by the Department's Office of Educational Research and Improvement in cooperation with Houghton Mifflin Company, a publishing firm based in Boston, Mass., and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). Houghton Mifflin designed the 23-page booklet and printed 120,000 copies for distribution free of charge. NAESP, a 25,000-member professional association based in suburban Washington, D.C., is mailing a copy of the booklet to every elementary and middle school principal in the country, also free of charge.

"By working together with the private sector and a non-federal organization," Cavazos said, "this valuable booklet will reach a broader audience at very little cost to the tax-paying public. It's a splendid example of a public-private partnership effort to boost learning and benefit the young people of our country."

Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Principals Can Do is the third companion booklet based on the findings and conclusions of Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading, a 1985 report written by a national panel of reading experts. That report critically examined the teaching of reading and offered recommendations to policymakers, parents, teachers, publishers, and school personnel.

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The booklet for principals, like those written for teachers and parents in 1986 and 1988 respectively, is based on the Commission's research as well as other reading research supported by the Education Department.

The booklet is divided into four sections:

* What does a school that values literacy look and feel like?

* What should a principal know about reading? What is reading? What is good reading instruction? What is good assessment?

* What can a principal do to create a community of readers? How do you work with the school; work with the district; and work with parents?

* What are the next steps?

Cavazos announced the new publication in a press conference at the annual meeting of elementary school principals in Atlanta.

Additional copies of Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Principals Can Do are available for $2.00 from the National Association of Elementary School Principals, Educational Products Center, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3483.

Single copies of Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Parents Can Do are available when you send your name and address and 50 cents to Department 459V, Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, CO 81009. Packages of 10 copies are $5.00 from D.C. Heath and Company, Distribution Center, 2700 North Richardt Avenue, Indianapolis, IN 46219. Request ISBN code number 19500-6.

Becoming a Nation of Readers: Implications for Teachers is available for $1.50 a copy from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402-9371. Request stock number 065-000-00260-4.

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For more information, call Tim Burr at 202/357-6558.