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ABSTRACT

Discussing how the National Reading Panel is searching to gain valuable perspectives and insights from practitioners and other stakeholders engaged in the teaching and learning of reading, this paper considers insight from practitioners outside of the panel members. It reviews the major concepts discussed at five regional meetings of the National Reading Panel conducted May to July 1998. It discusses parameters of reading research and the teacher's involvement in research. The paper discusses effective reading instruction and considers the development from phonemic awareness to comprehension. It also discusses measures for professional development. A section is devoted to parent's involvement in learning to read and to special needs children, respectively. The paper concludes by discussing what the panel learned from local meetings. (SC)

Prepared by The Widmeyer-Baker Group of:

National Reading Panel Regional Meeting Synthesis

September 1998

For Possible Discussion at Sept. 10 NRP Meeting

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Introduction: Voices From the Field

Thirteen members of the National Reading Panel (NRP) assembled for their inaugural meeting in Bethesda, MD on Friday, April 24, 1998 at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). Despite their diverse professional expertise, interests, and approaches to teaching children how to read, Panel members determined that they could not effectively carry out their Congressional mandate of assessing the readiness of research-based knowledge for application in homes or schools without gaining valuable perspectives and insights from practitioners and other stakeholders engaged in the teaching and learning of reading across America.

By unanimous decision, Panel members felt it was of paramount importance to supplement their review and scrutiny of research findings by listening to and learning from the many voices of parents, educators, students, community members, and civic and business leaders whose own practical experiences and knowledge of craft would balance and inform the Panel's inquiry. To accomplish this objective, Panel members decided to organize a series of regional meetings in Chicago, IL (May 29, 1998), Portland, OR (June 5, 1998), Houston, TX (June 8, 1998), New York, NY (June 23, 1998), and Jackson, MS (July 9, 1998).

Through news releases and articles, public service announcements, notifications and letters of invitations, the NRP blanketed the nation and host communities with information on its mandate and approach—encouraging concerned individuals, reading experts, parents, teachers, researchers, and representatives of national, state, and local organizations to attend one or more of the regional meetings, request presentation opportunities in advance, or sign-up on-site to provide public comment that would contribute to the Panel's work.

In total, close to 400 people attended regional meetings, where Panelist heard from 44 invited presenters and 73 members of the public who addressed their concerns about reading. The regional meetings helped Panel members better understand how reading is currently taught, what the challenges and opportunities are in changing reading instruction, and how to translate the Panel's findings to meet the information needs of various audiences.

Congress originally charged the National Reading Panel with assessing "the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children how to read." In its report, the Panel is to "present the Panel's conclusions, an indication of the readiness for application in the classroom of the results of this research, and, if appropriate, a strategy for rapidly disseminating this information to facilitate effective reading instruction in the schools." Through these regional meetings, the Panel learned first hand what various stakeholders currently know and believe about reading and reading research, providing a starting point for dissemination efforts. Individual speakers also revealed how these audiences view various aspects of reading research and specific programs to help students read. By presenting their experience and knowledge of reading instruction, these speakers helped Panelists better determine the readiness of schools to apply the results of their research.

This report reviews the major concepts discussed at the five regional meetings conducted May to July 1998. It synthesizes remarks made by the presenters and organizes them into several predominate themes that emerged:

- validity of research;
- breadth of research;
- importance of educators;
- definition of reading instruction and goals;
- phonics and comprehension;
- reading as a cross-disciplinary skill;
- multiple approaches to instruction;
- professional development;
- the role of parents and other concerned family members;
- special-needs individuals and situations;
- dissemination priorities and recommendations; and
- miscellaneous comments.

By seeking out voices from the field—and considering not only public counsel, but also the implications of practitioner concerns—the Panel embarked on a process to yield far more than a compendium of research for academics. Rather, it would be poised to craft a final report that took into account where educators and other stakeholders currently stand on the teaching of reading. Information from the regional meetings would also make the report of Panel findings much more useful and accessible to those in schools, homes, and communities throughout America. Throughout the regional hearings, Panel members remained strong in their conviction that a good faith effort to learn more from ordinary Americans, as well as those who have long studied reading research, would undoubtedly help them prepare a final report that would speak to a wide majority of Americans and impact their work with children, educators, and schools.

The meetings also demonstrated the Panel's respect for the practice and knowledge of those who work with children and helped them to shape a final

report that is not a prescription written by an elite group of academics, but a summary of the state of current knowledge on teaching reading that draws on multiple sources, including the experience of practitioners. This qualitative research into the beliefs and opinions of parents, educators, and members of the general public provided a vital balance to the investigative research conducted by the six Panel subcommittees. The voices collected in this report demonstrate areas of public concern, highlight questions that the Panel should address, and draw attention to programs that can serve as models of how to disseminate reading research into practice.

Research – What is Valid?

Many presenters at the regional meetings provided their own experience and opinions about how reading should be taught, or they described their own programs that were designed to help children learn to read. As the purpose of the regional meetings was to learn how reading instruction is perceived by those working with children, very few of the presenters addressed the research issues and the question of what forms of research are valid.

Those who did, however, criticized the accuracy and utility of existing research in reading. Chief among those critics was Ed Kamenui, professor at the College of Education at the University of Oregon, director of the Institute for the Development of Educational Achievement in the university's College of Education, and a member of the National Academy of Sciences' National Research Council Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Children. Kamenui discussed the problems facing the National Reading Panel in determining what research is valid and reliable. He said that his experience as a member of the NAS panel told him that the biggest challenge and most important charge facing the NRP is to agree on formal rules of evidence that can help in the selection of research studies meeting the highest evidentiary standards. "Standards that will engender public support and the belief that your recommendations are based on trustworthy, valid, reliable, and usable research," he said. "Your primary charge, then, is not necessarily about reading; but about what passes as acceptable scientific evidence in the current educational research on teaching children to read in an alphabetic writing system."

The Gold Standard: Scientific Rules of Evidence

To winnow the wheat from the chaff, Kamenui recommended that the NRP "stick with the most rigorous rules of scientific evidence available in determining what is acceptable for informing practice." Calling science "our primary means for guarding against the false or fashionable," he urged the Panel adopt a strict standard in deciding what research to use. He also warned against a tendency he perceives in the field of education where opinions and beliefs masquerade as facts evidenced from rigorous, reliable, and replicable research.

At the Houston meeting, Darvin Winick of the Governor's Business Council also agreed that scientific criteria for determining the acceptability of research

findings must be developed. According to Winick, knowledge about how to teach reading does exist but it is not used in many classrooms. For example, Winick said, when Texas business leaders tried to help implement Governor George W. Bush's goal of having all children reading "on grade level" by grade three, they were surprised to receive confusing advice from the experts. "Advocates for various approaches to the teaching of reading quickly came forward. But many were unable to provide us with any credible proof that their approach worked."

In conducting their own research analysis, the Governor's Business Council was surprised to find "an enormous variation in the quality of evidence of effectiveness that was available for various reading instructional programs." Winick said that some approaches were well-supported by controlled experimentation, while others were backed by what he labeled "poor or inappropriate research." Too many studies lacked the standards for proper scientific inquiry, which he characterized as "clear statements of hypotheses, controlled experimental conditions, standardized treatment, and reliable and objective measurement." He blamed this on a tendency in the field of education to inadequately develop data and a hesitancy to look at research in psychology, physiology, and other fields for models.

Winick called on the NRP to eliminate misinformation about how reading skills are acquired. When, for example, his group announced they were looking for research-based programs, everyone claimed that their program was based upon research. But the quality of this research varied. "I just wonder," said Winick, "should it be necessary for people outside of education to go through the high level of effort to protect our investment in the schools. Should educational researchers not have a higher standard? Why is there no accountability for the quality of investigation and reporting?"

Winick also warned the Panel against writing a compromised document that supports every theory. Instead the NRP should adhere to its charge by "taking into account the relevance, methodological rigor and applicability, validity, reliability, and replicability of the reported research." Only experimental evidence should be used to set a high standard for future research, he asserted. For this reason Winick did not give his own opinion on how reading should be taught. Instead he encouraged debate over reliably obtained performance data.

Establishing a High Degree of Confidence in the Research Base

David Denton, Director of Health and Human Services Programs for the Southern Regional Education Board, expressed a greater degree of confidence in the reliability of the research. He said that reading research is "as valid as research can be, as long as we recognize that knowledge is not static, and that tomorrow, or next week, or next year, there will be new research that will inevitably alter our understanding of today's research findings." While more research is always needed, the research we currently have is sufficient to use as the basis for policy and conclusions as long as we are willing to change our minds should we develop different evidence.

However, Denton expressed this confidence only about the research conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), not about other studies. He said that, "[NICHD] research has been characterized by the highest scientific standards, and it has provided invaluable knowledge about how good readers read, and why many children do not become good readers. The NICHD research has clearly shown us that phonemic awareness, the knowledge that certain letters and letter combinations correspond to certain sounds is a critically important skill that all good readers must master."

Furthermore, he added that much of this research does not make it into the classroom and that some reading programs lack evidence of their effectiveness. "The biggest problem posed by the research on reading today is that we haven't yet figured out how to make sure that all teachers have that full range of instructional tools at their disposal, and that they have the ability to use appropriate assessments to make the right choices for different children. And the piece of those tools which seems to be most missing, particularly among new graduates, is the ability to assess and teach specific skills such as phonemic awareness."

Denton described the NICHD research as supporting the claims of non-extremists from both the phonics and whole language camps. "It is clear from that research that the best reading programs provide many opportunities for children to read a wide variety of good literature. There is nothing in the research that supports the idea that a program based exclusively on skills instruction or phonics, with little emphasis on reading for meaning and pleasure, is an appropriate way to teach reading. Children must master the necessary skills, but they must also be engaged and given reasons for wanting to read." He found that "the great contribution of the NICHD research is that it tells us how important it is to make sure that one particular piece of the reading puzzle, phonemic awareness, is in place for all children at least by third grade." Ultimately, he supported a balanced approach that recognizes that this balance could be different for different children.

Although only a few of the speakers examined the question of the validity of the research, those who did supported a hard, scientific approach. Without such a scientific approach, they maintained there is a danger in relying merely on opinion or being seen as a combatant in the false dichotomy of between phonics and whole language that has been dubbed the "reading wars."

Reading Research: Cast the Net Broadly

The National Reading Panel was advised by presenters to cast its net broadly—making sure to capture the essence of reading research. In general, presenters appeared to convey that while the graphophenomic system of language and its relevance to the reading process has been well documented, other areas that also directly bear on reading acquisition have been neglected or not conveyed to teachers.

Specifically, speakers petitioned for the inclusion of emerging brain research, writing as part of reading instruction, and anthropological considerations to become part of a reading research "package" that is made available to educators.

Jennifer Monoghan, founder of the History of Reading Special Interest Group at Brooklyn College, questioned why writing is not an integral part of the reading process. "Why is there a National Reading Panel, but no National Writing Panel?" she queried. "Why are we so obsessed by children's failure to read when we are relatively cavalier about their failure to write?"

One way Monoghan linked reading and writing is through phonemic segmentation, a basic requirement of both. She encouraged those in the field of reading to focus on teaching teachers about the orthography and phonology of their own language.

Reading research also should devote time to the study of emerging brain research, particularly in early childhood, noted Kathy Grace, an early childhood expert from Tupelo, Mississippi. She cited a national program involving physicians that helps disseminate reading information to parents. Noting her familiarity with the program locally, she said pediatricians in Greenville, SC, regularly give parents a "prescription" that says: "Read to your child." They also give them a book. Said Grace; "The physician gives the book because it is a health issue. It is a development of the brain issue. It is not just an educational issue."

A number of presenters advised the Panel to include in its study a review of research on the impact of technology on reading. Mark Horney, from the Center for Advanced Technology in Education at the University of Oregon, described two research projects designed to make better use of technology to teach reading: "Project Literacy High," which uses electronic versions of text to help hearing-impaired students improve reading skills, holds significant promise for all readers; and the "de Anza Multimedia Project," currently under construction, applies the "supported text" notion to create a web-based learning environment "where you would study from a whole collection of texts all with resources on a particular domain of study," explained Horney. He added that his work centers on reading to learn, rather than learning to read.

Educational anthropology is missing from the reading research equation, according to Jan Lewis, a professor at the Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. In presenting to the Panel, she defined educational anthropology as a "way of taking what we know from anthropology, that of looking at cultures ... from the perspective of the participant or the stakeholder or the person who was involved." In the education field, that means examining the players involved in schools—primarily the student and teacher—and observing, from their perspective, what is happening in the classroom. "We look at the perspective of the teacher," said Lewis. " We look at the perspective of the child and how those [perspectives] may interact."

Becky McTage, an Illinois teacher, also counseled the Panel to consider

research from a variety of fields. She called the Reading Recovery program effective because of its ability to answer questions about a child's reading development within a "broader base and context" than is generally the case with other reading programs.

Panel Urged to Avoid Skirting Tough Issues

A few speakers stated that, contrary to media headlines and professional judgments that various approaches to reading instruction are segments of a broad spectrum associated with child development and acquisition of reading skills as opposed to competing camps, the "reading wars" are not over—at least not on the frontlines of education. They called on the NRP to clear up the muddied waters.

For example, rather than adding new items to the reading research agenda, Ally Sullo, editorial director of reading language arts at Houghton-Mifflin Company, made a case for addressing issues only partially covered by the recent National Research Council report. Sullo claimed the artillery is still firing between phonics and whole language forces because the NRC report failed to "come to grips with some of the most contentious issues ... including organizing or grouping for reading instruction, the role of phonics, and the advantages and disadvantages of various beginning reading texts." She hoped the Panel would "further the fine work of the NRC committee and ... address some of these contentious issues as well as establish a research agenda."

Charles Arthur, a first-grade teacher in Portland, also expressed concern over the "very murky" view of reading caused by "statements made by this particular panel and other councils on this subject." He maintained that political balance "was king," rather than helping teachers make good choices. According to Arthur, the penultimate question to be answered is: "Are there good starting skills that lead more successfully to the full act of reading than others?"

Teachers: The Missing Voice

Numerous presenters praised the National Reading Panel for seeking out the perspective of classroom teachers. They repeated a common refrain among American teachers about the lack of respect afforded them by the public and policymakers. Panel members were urged to "continue to put human faces on this issue," and to extend to teachers "the trust and the expectation that they will make effective professional decisions about how to use them."

Portland teacher Michael Ann Ortloff discussed the need to respect the knowledge and work of teachers. Ortloff underscored that respect for the professional efforts of reading teachers should be "implicit" in the work of this Panel or any other that may be assigned the task of tackling a subject as complex as reading.

One speaker vilified schools of education, state legislative bodies, and others for disempowering teachers by taking instructional decision-making out of their hands. James Hoffman, professor of language and studies at the University of

Texas, said disempowerment occurs when teacher educators promote a particular method of teaching, when researchers study "method A versus method B," or when policy makers "who control the curriculum through mandated assessments manipulate the teacher incentive or reward systems to reflect a particular conception of teaching, who impose standards for student performance with high-stakes consequences for both teachers and students, who control the very nature of the curriculum materials that enter classrooms."

Hoffman boldly goes where no other presenter journeyed by suggesting that the Panel stamp out these disempowering factors by first visiting state testing plans that define the curriculum. He looked no further than his home state of Texas, railing against what he considers to be the false claims of increased reading scores as demonstrated by the state's TASS test. He compared the increase in TASS scores to the fact that reading achievement scores on norm-referenced tests have remained relatively flat. "How can this be?" he queried. "Could it be that we are only teaching to the test?"

Hoffman clearly stated that his position does not suggest that empowering teachers alone is sufficient to produce effective teaching. He acknowledged that "you cannot empower ignorance and expect results." Instead, "we must educate and empower. Both are necessary."

Teachers As Researchers

A more common theme echoed by other speakers was to highlight teachers' roles as classroom researchers. Kim Patterson, with the Mississippi Writing-Thinking Institute, and Pacific Lutheran University professor Jan Lewis discussed the merits of examining the role of teachers as researchers. Patterson's Institute promotes professional development opportunities that allow teachers to develop instructional strategies based on research. She urged the Panel to hear the voices of front-line teachers who have conducted "action research" that provides "valuable information about how kids learn to read."

Lewis depicted teachers as "classroom researchers" who are "critical to our understanding" of how reading takes place. She encouraged the Panel to seek out teachers who best exemplify solid teaching, "support their work, encourage the publication of their own classroom stories, consider the successes."

While teachers' voices as "classroom researchers" should be heard, several speakers underscored that teachers should not work in isolation to advance student reading skills. Paula Costello, English language arts coordinator for a large suburban school district outside Buffalo, New York, relayed to the Panel the benefits of teacher study groups in describing her recent work with seventh- and eighth-grade English teachers who formed such a group to examine remedial practices.

Collaboration is a requirement for success in the classroom, according to New York University Professor Trika Smith-Burke. Unfortunately, collaboration among teachers, central administrators, researchers, and others is an onerous

task. Smith-Burke's first-hand experience of trying to mesh schedules between the university and the classroom often ended in defeat, she noted.

Obstacles to Teaching Success

Scheduling conflicts pale in comparison to other obstacles that block teacher success, especially for beginning teachers. University of Southern Mississippi Professor Dana Thames elaborated on these dilemmas to Panel members at the Mississippi meeting. Many teachers decide to begin their teaching career on the road easiest to travel, partly due to the lack of respect and compensation awarded American teachers, she noted.

Other obstacles cited include:

- family members who harp on the new teacher that they are working too hard;
- the lack of effectiveness of the new teacher's former student-teacher mentor;
- the role played by the building and school administration, especially if it is one that hinders creativity and innovation;
- state accountability and school-level accreditation, which may lead to higher test scores and a high accreditation level, but do not "necessarily indicate success in literacy, because most assessment focus on isolated segments of decoding rather than on comprehension;" and
- peer pressure from older teachers that causes the new teacher to try to fit in by not doing things "too far out of the norm."

Effective Reading Instruction and Goals: Some "Big Ideas"

Skepticism prevailed among the speakers over the status of the "reading wars." Even if overt fighting has ceased, fundamental questions have been left unanswered and information on the teaching of reading reaches the hands of too few teachers.

One speaker observed that the introduction of new state-driven student content standards has added a new dimension to the reading debate. A paradigm shift in education has left reading research languishing in a past era, according to Dick Allington, professor and chair of reading at the State University of New York, Albany. "Research has not caught up with policy and practice," he argued, since new student standards have been introduced in schools nationwide. The new standards "offer a different vision of what it means to be literate from the old minimum competency definitions that have been so pervasive," he observed.

An example Allington offered is the preponderance of research that supports the importance of phonemic awareness and phonemic segmentation. This, he said, stands in stark comparison with the paucity of information on how to develop phoneme awareness and segmentation in young students. He also reported that while research studies exist that "describe the nature of teacher

training," few "describe the impact of the training in terms of how teachers teach, much less whether student learning is affected."

Allington raised concerns that few studies tease out why something is working. He noted that often long-term effects might significantly differ from short-term effects that are evident in a program under study.

Ken Pugh, representing Haskins Laboratories in Connecticut and Yale University School of Medicine, offered a detailed description of neurobiological research that examines brain functions of dyslexic adults compared to a control group that is underway as a collaborative effort between Haskins and Yale. The research detected that when both sets of readers moved from orthography to orthography plus phonology, there was a noted difference in the way their brain systems responded. The bottom line: "the signature of a phonological deficit" in the dyslexic adults is evident. Pugh called for additional studies to ascertain how intense phonological remediation affects brain patterns.

One critic of the recently released NRC report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children,* urged Panel members to pick up the pieces by addressing several research issues. Jerome Harste, Vice President of the National Council of Teachers of English, claimed the NRC report offers no consistent model of learning, which results in teachers receiving a "mixed message" regarding how to teach. The NRC report also did not offer a consistent definition of reading, said Harste, nor did it allocate sufficient time to research surrounding comprehension issues.

Another theme that emerged from regional meetings was the stated dangers of "tinkering around the edges of reading." Most who spoke to the issue believed that minor changes would not lead to more effective reading instruction. Mike Walters, Director of the Mississippi Association of School Superintendents, said he learned that tinkering with the system "will result ... in the disappointment of us all." For him, the reading problem transcends the schools, forcing the community and family to evaluate their role in student achievement.

While some speakers urged professional development opportunities to focus on providing teachers with knowledge of multiple strategies for enhancing reading programs, other speakers focused on more discrete issues. For example, Seattle University Professor Kathryn Schlick Noe said helping children see themselves as readers and writers is a key component of effective reading instruction. She suggests that children learn to read and write "within a context of its application in the real world."

Barbara Foorman, professor and director of the Center for Academic and Reading Skills at the University of Texas, Houston, purported that to teach reading effectively, instruction must "promote reading success, specifically success in identifying words and understanding text." Foorman contended that a first step is the child's ability to segment the sounds of words. Programs that focus on the most frequent spelling patterns for the approximately 44

phonemes of English "can bring children at risk for learning to read to a national average in decoding words." She coupled the phonological approach with an emphasis on reading for comprehension, the ultimate goal of reading. According to Foorman, an effective reading program would include word recognition, spelling, vocabulary, and comprehension. All are linked. Word recognition allows children to develop memory and attention, which are key for comprehension. Spelling takes students beyond phonics to "learn about word meanings and writing conventions." It is hard to read and spell, said Foorman, without broadening one's vocabulary. Comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading.

Other speakers offered their opinions on whole language, phonics, and other strategies for teaching reading skills. For example, University of Utah Professor Kathleen Brown underscored at the New York meeting that research indicates reading by context alone is an unreliable and inefficient aspect of any reading program. Although many teachers encourage their nascent readers to rely on context clues for decoding unknown words, Brown finds it an abhorrent practice. "Using context to identify words only works about approximately 25 percent of the time and it is poor readers who rely on these strategies to identify words," she said. A more effective strategy, she noted, is decoding by analogy. In other words, when confronted by an unknown word, effective readers use chunks they remember from other words to discover an approximate pronunciation of the unknown word.

Seattle Pacific University Professor Bill Nagy focused his presentation on the important role vocabulary plays in reading comprehension. However, he cautioned that spending more time doing vocabulary activities is not the correct route. Instead, teachers "need to be more intentional about doing what we can to promote vocabulary growth in our students." He suggested a multi-pronged approach, with "wide reading" as a cornerstone, including individual word education, word learning strategies, and word consciousness promotion.

"Big ideas" tangential to reading acquisition also surfaced during the meetings. According to many speakers, improved reading achievement is not possible without addressing such issues as class-size reduction, teacher training, consideration of different learning styles, and early intervention. Portland parent Lisa Leslie advised, "If your desire is to accomplish something other than stirring the reading debate pot, you are going to have to look beyond just finding the best practice and the research and look at some of the big ideas that would apply to any reading method that is used in the classrooms."

Stepping Stones for Reading: From Phonemic Awareness to Comprehension

To borrow from Dr. Seuss, reading is a great balancing act, according to most speakers. Most presenters supported reading instruction that combines systematic phonics with good children's literature. Susan Stires, a staff developer in New York City representing the National Council of Teachers of English, spoke for many when she endorsed a reading approach that

combines "phonology and meaning-making [as] both are essential to children's learning to read."

While not dismissing whole language, other presenters cheered phonics as the "come-back kid" in the great debate. Most echoed Portland parent and educator Sharim Wimbley Gouveia, who insisted that children must be taught how to decode the language using phonics since "our system of spelling and reading was created as a sound-symbol relationship."

Several presenters discussed the needs of children who do not require phonics instruction to break the code. Some argued that if reading instruction was truly individualized, the needs of these children could easily be met. On the other hand, Dorothy Whitehead, a veteran reading teacher with 38 years of experience, spoke up in favor of a whole language program that does not "completely ignore the 20 percent of the children who need the phonics to decode the words."

One speaker railed against an approach to reading instruction that includes both phonemic awareness and whole language strategies. Jimmy Kilpatrick, director of READ BY GRADE 3.com, insisted that a program including phonics and whole language only confuses children. Said Kilpatrick, "In actuality, I believe public schools in this country have been teaching the balanced approach for reading for years. This is why our students cannot read. Most teachers have been providing a smattering of phonics with whole language lessons. The children have been totally confused because whole language means teach the children to read form the whole to the part; phonics means to teach children to read from the part to the whole. ... How can children keep from being confused when the two approaches are mixed or balanced?" Kilpatrick unequivocally concluded that whole language is "educational malpractice for the bottom 20 percent of our student population."

Striking a Balance in Reading Instruction

Flexibility is key to a successful reading program, stated David Denton, Director of the Health and Human Services Program of the Southern Regional Education Board, because "children aren't all the same." He called for a "flexible, multi-faceted approach to reading, or a 'balanced approach,' for want of a better term," a theme echoed by a broad range of speakers. Denton stressed that balance means different things for different children.

Officials from Chicago, Portland, Houston, New York, and Jackson presented their schools' plans to improve reading achievement. All promoted balance in their reading programs. Student standards were set and assessments developed to measure progress.

"A Balanced Approach to Reading" is the title given to Houston Public Schools' reading program. Phyllis Hunter, reading manager for Houston Independent School District, explained the six key features of the reading program: phonological awareness; print awareness; alphabetic awareness; orthographic awareness; comprehension strategy; and reading practice. These principles

are imbedded in a literature- and language-rich environment.

Early Identification of Weaknesses

One issue that united presenters is the need for an early screening test to detect a weakness in phonological awareness. Yolanda Proust, a linguist who addressed the Houston meeting, called upon researchers to develop tests for teachers to use to assess "on-the-spot" a "poor reader" who has not grasped phoneme awareness skills.

To respond to this need, Hofstra University Psychology Professor Charles Levanthal has been engaged for the past eight years in developing a "quick and effective screening instrument for the detection of reading difficulties based upon the acknowledged role of phonological coding skills in the process of reading." His instrument, "The Quick Rhyming Test" (QRT) is based on phonological and orthographic similarity and dissimilarity. It is a 15-minute test for both children and adults that Levenathal claimed correlates with subscores on the Stanford Achievement Test and the Woodcock Reading Subtests for adults.

Reading: A Cross-Disciplinary Approach that Requires Systemic Change

Steve Bingham, representing the Southeast Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) – a consortium of educators in the southeast United States – at the Jackson meeting, describes what teachers need to build a strong reading program. Such a program is based on the following principles:

- stated goals and expected student outcomes are discussed and shared;
- goals and outcomes are consistent across a school, not just a classroom;
- texts and other materials fit the program goals;
- individualized instruction is available for students needing more support than others;
- students read frequently from "relevant-leveled books of their choice;"
- student progress is assessed and documented in an ongoing fashion;
- teachers receive more reading research information;
- teachers get continual feedback on how to apply new instructional approaches;
- reading is considered a cross-disciplinary skill;
- the program is modeled, possibly through school-wide reading events and through activities that involve the community.

Another champion of system-wide reform was Amy Alday-Murray, from the Oregon Department of Education, who described the comprehensive educational standards-setting process underway in her state. Common curriculum goals guide local educators in developing a curriculum, while content standards "identify the essential knowledge and skills expected of all

students. These standards are assessed statewide. The benchmarks, set for grades three, five, eight, and 10, serve as indicators and can be used by teachers as diagnostic tools.

Oregon has a multiple-choice assessment and a requirement for local performance assessments, also given at grades three, five, eight, and 10. Statewide scoring guides have been developed, and training for reading teachers is underway. Future goals include engaging parents in home and school literacy and providing support in reading instruction for secondary-level teachers.

Chicago Public Schools also produced a comprehensive plan to increase student reading achievement. As told by Cozette Buckney, chief education officer for the city's school system, the plan covers pre-K through 12th grade. The system made headlines by putting 109 schools on probation, with the administration providing extensive help to upgrade programs, including reading. The school system then placed reading coordinators in the 76 next lowest performing schools to help redesign the reading program. Academic standards were established systemwide, and social promotion was eliminated. According to Buckney, students cannot enter high school unless they are reading at the 7.2 grade level, up from 6.8. Strong support systems were put in place, including after-school and summer programs to help students achieve at least grade level in reading.

Mary Ann Graczyk, president of the Mississippi American Federation of Teachers, Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel, called upon the Panel to champion a variety of conditions for reform of the many systems that support teaching and learning in individual schools and districts. "This means teachers and students must be guaranteed a safe, orderly environment of learning where there are expectations of high standards of discipline and achievement of all students," she explained. She called for necessary planning time for teachers and an "end to the excessive use of teachers' time for non-teaching duties." For Graczyk, systemic change also means an end to using poverty as an excuse for the lack of achievement. "Poverty is not a synonym for stupidity, laziness, ineptitude, or lack of learning or caring."

Successful Reading—A Lifelong Learning Experience

A focus on reading should start early in a child's life and extend beyond the walls of the classroom. "Early education has got to start earlier and earlier," said William Winters, former governor of Mississippi. He explained that one of his greatest challenges as governor was to pass a public kindergarten bill in Mississippi. The state now makes kindergarten possible for every child.

Deborah Shaver, a primary teacher from Portland, encouraged the Panel to include in its study the importance of capitalizing on eager attitudes toward learning that youngsters typically bring to first grade. Shaver advocated that more resources and time be devoted to first-grade reading. Teachers must find

a way to capture the eagerness first graders bring to school to learn to read, she said. "That is where our biggest payback will be because we are getting children who are engaged and who want to learn and who do not have to carry the baggage of 'I cannot do this, or I have tried, or I am not as good as everybody else,'" she said.

Other presenters called upon the Panel to continue reading education beyond the early years of school. Dawn Tyler, an eighth-grade reading teacher in Mississippi who just completed her first year in the classroom, addressed the need for reading instruction beyond third grade. She urged Panel members to consider the needs older students, as well as those from rural communities.

Ellen Faeder, youth service coordinator for Multnomah County Library, offered insight into how libraries can participate in reading instruction. Libraries in 18 counties in Oregon participate in the Reading for Healthy Start Project, which receives federal and state funding. An emergent literacy program for expectant and new parents is part of the program run out of the Multnomah County Library. Called "Born to Read," the program is affiliated with the American Library Association. Other programs run under the auspices of local libraries are "Ready to Read" and "Similar Books to You," which send trained individuals into third- to fifth-grade classrooms in low-income schools to help with academics.

While underscoring the importance of libraries in supporting reading instruction, Janice Cate, an English-as-a-Second-Language teacher, decried the lack of books in school and classroom libraries. Not only do more books need to be made available to students, she said, children and adults also need to choose what they want to read.

David Wizig, a Houston middle school teacher, reported on the importance of having students, in his case middle school students, choose their own books. He found self-selection to be a great motivational tool.

Reading: There's No Magic Bullet

There are many ways up a mountain, said one presenter in describing the various approaches he believes must be corralled to produce effective reading instruction. Other presenters agreed that a one-size-fits-all reading model fails to address the needs of all children. Several presenters added that reading instruction should be part of a cross-disciplinary practice that includes at least writing and spelling.

Learning to read should be a universal goal, presenters maintained, with multitudinous paths leading to goal achievement. Speakers were unequivocal that the one-size-fits-all reading model has failed students nationwide. Instead, teachers must first be able to recognize different learning styles and then be able to match appropriate strategies to the individual needs of the child.

In broader strokes, several speakers distinguished the earliest readers into two groups: those who have phonemic awareness skills and those who require

direct instruction to acquire these skills that support reading. Along these lines, Kathryn Ransom, President of the International Reading Association, emphasized the different learning styles of early readers. She noted that phonemic awareness is an "essential element of learning to read," but "universal intensive direct instruction of the alphabetic principle is not as clearly necessary for all children."

More information must get into the hands of educators for them to provide high-quality teaching practice that best fits the needs of any individual or group. Mississippi Teacher of the Year Tina Scholtes hailed the Success for All model because it addresses all learning styles. A belief that all children can learn to read undergirds the program. It also is designed to start reading instruction wherever the child lies on the ready-to-read spectrum, rather than "throw[ing children] into something that they are not prepared for."

One Size Does Not Fit All

Kittye Copeland, a 31-year veteran teacher, urged the Panel to reject ideas about whole group instruction, claiming that it forces "teachers to fragment language and it also sets up situations that children have to sit through things that they already know and they do not need to hear or they are not ready to hear it." Children, then, are unable to pay attention and grab hold of what is being presented to them. Copeland stated that the "personalization of reading is ignored and often individual learners are devalued."

Speaking to the issue of whether it is feasible to individualize instruction in the average American classroom, Sholtes maintained, "You can do it. It is not impossible." She added that her school has built into its daily schedule 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction every day. All teachers become reading teachers, with children divided into groups based on "where they felt comfortable."

Yet most teachers are trained in only one method of reading instruction, noted Miriam Balmuth, professor at the Hunter College School of Education, at the New York Panel meeting. She observed several pitfalls with this approach. First, many first-year teachers trained in one method often end up in a school system that expects them to teach reading requiring the application of the principles of another method. Culpability for this one-method dilemma rests on the faculty of schools of education and reading researchers, who often travel down the "well-trodden path of ... research that focuses on examining whole programs ..."

Faculty and researchers mistakenly have been searching for a "teacher-proof method," she claimed. Said Balmuth, "What may be needed instead of one grounded teacher-proof method is a universe of well-grounded, method-proof teachers."

The divide between instructional paths should not be carved between special-needs and regular populations, but on the specific needs of the individual child. One parent attributed the reading success of her profoundly

hard-of-hearing child to the individualized instruction she receives at her school. "This should be a goal for all of mainstreamed children," declared parent Lisa Leslie. She conceded, however, that the teacher-student ratio in most classrooms prohibits reading instruction designed to meet the particular needs of an individual child; and she called for "reducing the ratio."

Both Portland primary teacher Deborah Shaver and Peter Thacker, a teacher at Portland's Cleveland High School, supported Leslie's call for individualized instruction. "It is very important to follow the lead of the kids," said Thacker. "No one strategy works for all children," echoed Shaver. Thacker also offered a critical view of reading research, which he said, "looks at the mean." Instead, teachers should "look at the individual," he declared.

Concurring that the one-size-fits-all approach to reading excludes hordes of students, Shirley Tipton, from the Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities, urged the Panel to pursue multiple approaches to reading instruction that considers a wide variety of learning styles. She also advocated persistence. "Do not change from one type of reading instruction to another so often that the child or the adult, in sheer desperation, simply gives up or drops out and becomes another literacy statistic."

Professional Development: The Cornerstone of Reading Achievement

Presenters at all sites implored Panel members to address the need for effective, research-based pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities for teachers charged with teaching children how to read and comprehend. However, it was the prospective teacher's undergraduate coursework in reading, or lack thereof, that received the most attention.

Far too often, teachers unprepared to handle the complexity of reading instruction are sent to the frontlines of education, and, as noted by one speaker, through default refer only to the teacher's manual in a basal reading program. These teachers, at best, do little to advance the reading skills of students who easily break the code; at worst, they wreak havoc on the reading abilities of children who require direct instruction in phonological awareness.

Kay Allen, associate director of the Neihaus Education Center in Houston, was one speaker who called for the renewal of pre-service reading education. The Center is a not-for-profit education foundation that offers teachers ongoing professional development in reading instruction, emphasizing the needs of students at-risk for reading failure.

Many of the teachers who troop through the Center's doors leave complaining, "'why wasn't I taught this information in my education classes at the university?'" reported Allen, in summarizing the Center's propositions to:

- give pre-service teachers the information they will need in order to help all of their students achieve their potential in reading and writing, particularly the 15 to 20 percent who are at risk for reading failure without explicit instruction;

- strengthen training requirements for those teaching reading to first, second, and third graders;
- provide in-service training for teachers already in the classroom whose pre-service training did not provide them with what they need and whose awareness of research does not include more recent findings such as the role that phonological awareness plays in the reading process."

Allen concluded, "To fail to provide teachers with the necessary knowledge base is to fail them in their professional preparation and ultimately to fail those students who look to them to unlock the door to literacy."

Norfolk State University's Reading Partners Clinic is a university-based program that tries to accomplish this training requirement. Carmelita Williams, professor in the School of Education at Norfolk State University, highlighted the Clinic's success with education majors and their young students. The program provides "practical and hands-on experiences [that are] useful in promoting successful readers," she noted.

Teacher training in reading should stress linguistics and language acquisition, according to Glenellen Pace, professor at Lewis and Clark University. She told the Panel this background would allow teachers to see that "the notion of phonics and whole language are not parallel constructs." Like many other presenters, Pace held that whole language is a philosophy, while phonics is a "little, tiny piece of teaching reading."

While acknowledging an urgent need for a "broadly grounded, scientifically credible, and educationally appropriate knowledge base" of reading instruction to serve as the "foundation for professional development," several speakers also highlighted formidable obstacles hindering progress in this area.

International Reading Association President Kathryn Ransom cautioned in Chicago that teachers are leery of change. "Teachers have grown tired and weary of today's magic bullet," she lamented. She and others also noted the lack of time afforded teachers during the school day to reflect on cutting-edge reading research and innovative ways to bring theory into practice. "I am sure each of you have been in a classroom and realized how little time there is for the professional educator to sit and think, to communicate with colleagues, to visit, to read research. They constantly have children in front of them," she told Panel members. "For any research-based recommendation to be effective it must be adapted to meet the needs of each school and community."

More Resources Are Needed to Improve Teacher Professional Development

Several speakers said it is a paucity of resources dedicated to reading instruction that plagues many schools. This lack of funds often leads to bad decisions at the local level. For example, IRA's Ransom reported that in some districts, untrained paraprofessionals provide reading instruction in an attempt to save money. Or a student with special needs has less time with a "highly qualified—and, yes—expensive professional reading teacher," she added.

Paula Costello, an English language arts coordinator for a large suburban school district outside of Buffalo, New York, echoed Ransom's dismay over lack of funds for training. Often, districts purchase "canned program[s]" that they drop in the laps of teachers, who then spend one day sifting through the manuals; and "they consider that professional development," said Costello. She warned that if the Panel develops recommendations that "leave leeway for districts" to grab hold of the basal programs, they will do that because it's easier than constructing more meaningful professional development opportunities.

Reinforcing the necessity of professional development for teachers, speakers from Oregon and Texas equated their city's and state's reading success to their ability to target funds specifically to teacher-training needs.

According to Michael Ann Ortloff, targeting funds for professional development that focuses on beginning reading strategies is a key element of early literacy programs in Portland Public Schools. Ortloff has worked as a pre-school through eighth-grade teacher, a middle school assistant principal, and elementary principal. She also was co-director of the Oregon Writing Project, and currently is the English Language Arts administrator for Portland Public Schools.

Portland's plan, which emphasizes professional development that allows teachers to "learn, revise, and implement effective literacy practices," also calls for extensive ongoing professional development in reading for all teachers.

Robin Gilchrist, assistant commissioner at the Texas Education Agency, highlighted her state's financial commitment to reading and the required professional development. All of the state's Goals 2000 funds were directed to staff development in reading, "particularly on continued, sustained professional development," remarked Gilchrist.

Methods to help teachers predict a child's reading difficulty and strategies to help young children at-risk of reading problems also were considered a critical piece of the reading puzzle by many speakers. Knowledge of appropriate early intervention strategies is considered essential to help place children on the road to reading, according to numerous speakers.

Patty Braunger, a 25-year teaching veteran, credited her training as a Reading Recovery teacher for allowing her to be a successful teacher of reading, even with children who are severely learning disabled. She joined the choir of reading teachers and researchers who strongly advocate early intervention. Said Baraunger, "There are those children that are labeled learning disabled because of a system that has not put the money into early intervention," including teacher training.

Parents and Reading: A Child's First Teacher

The Panel's inclusion of parents met with much applause at each of the meeting sites. For many speakers, the home-school connection is a vital, yet often underutilized, tool for teaching reading. The role of parents as a child's first teacher has gained status as breakthroughs in brain research have lent credence to what many teachers, psychologists, and social workers intuited through clinical experiences: learning takes place at a very early stage in life, and the interaction between child and parents and caregivers can make a significant impact on the child's future academic career.

Despite the potential of parental instruction on a child's future reading ability, Portland teacher Deborah Shaver alerted Panel members to an "us versus them" atmosphere that she has observed, pitting school staff against parents.

One Portland parent-volunteer, Mary Kelly Kline, offered that some educators are hesitant to reach out to parents because it "involves changing parent behavior" in some cases. The dirty little secret that no one wants to disclose, according to Kline, is that "unless a lot of parents' behaviors change ... regarding their children and reading in the home, it is unlikely that all the literacy strategies that we have heard today are going to be ultimately successful."

Mary Hardy, representing the Mississippi PTA, echoed Kline's concern, calling on the Panel to help get the message to parents that it is important for them to read with and to their children. Reading must be "advertised like McDonald's," she said.

The Value of Volunteers

Other speakers described successful parent volunteer or parent education programs that help parents encourage reading among their children and also promote intergenerational literacy skills. For example, Margaret Doughty, executive director of the Houston Read Commission, described the Houston Reads to Lead program – a program that depends on total community engagement to improve literacy skills. Catering to parents and children, the program operates in schools, parks, churches, community learning centers, and libraries. Doughty: "Family literacy as an intervention strategy has been proven to work. It ties family needs for self-sufficiency together and puts learning at the heart of change within a family."

Portland reading teacher Kathy Baird pointed to the strong parent-training component for the Reading Recovery program as a model for parent involvement. Miriam Westheimer represented the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) at the New York meeting. HIPPY works, according to Westheimer, because it does more than simply tell parents they should read to their children. It helps them get started by providing guidance on how to read to a child. HIPPY also is based on home visits conducted by paraprofessionals.

Joanne Wilson-Keenan, a language arts teacher from Springfield, Massachusetts, informed the Panel of the Springfield Learning Community

Collaborative, which she directs. The program was designed to "tap families' funds of knowledge and to change the relationships between urban families and schools." The Collaborative involves teachers, students, their families, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Jill Brennan, chairman and president of Reading is Fundamental in Chicago, and Nedra Whittig, executive director of Reading is Fundamental in Chicago, discussed RIF's strong parent component. Brennan clearly stated that the program's mission is not to teach children how to read, but to motivate them to want to read. Making parents partners is a critical element of RIF, and its subsidiary program, Project Open Book at Children's Memorial Hospital.

Whittig, director of Project Open Book, also acknowledged that parents are key to her program. Similar to the emphasis on parents in the HIPPY program, parents are given pointers on how to help their child read and include parent meetings which give plenty of opportunity for parents to learn from each other.

In Mississippi, Nadine Coleman describes the Parents As Teachers program, which operates under the Petal School District parenting center. Coleman, director of the center, explained that the parent program involves home-visits, in which staff make monthly visits to the parents of children ages zero to three.

Special Needs: No Child Benefits from a "Wait and Fail Model"

Prevailing commentary among speakers focused on the similarities of special-needs and regular-tracked students, rather than on their differences. For example, early intervention for reading was hailed by numerous presenters as imperative for both special-needs and general-education students.

Individualized reading programs also were hailed as essential for both special-needs and general-education students. However, many presenters acknowledged that learning-disabled students who are not appropriately taught how to read are especially vulnerable to failure.

Sandra Britt, from the Learning Disability Association of America, succinctly described the path far too many learning-disabled (LD) children travel. "Unless these children are identified early, and appropriate instruction provided, they may be passed along in school until basic reading instruction is no longer available," she said.

She added that many LD children require a multi-sensory phonics-based approach with instruction in phonemic awareness. Others need a "more meaning-based approach, while other students need interventions to address comprehension problems."

Some presenters argued that it is not the child who is at risk of a reading disability, but a school that is at risk for failing to teach children how to read. Cheryl Ames, from the Beaverton School District in Oregon, stressed that "policy and practice should emphasize effective early intervention prior to labeling [children] disabled." She cited an International Reading Association

publication that supports her view that stated that identifying a child learning disabled simply based on reading problems is inappropriate unless that child has received proper early intervention in reading instruction. She added that instruction for these children should be in small groups, if not one-on-one, and consist of at least 30 minutes each day for at least one full year by a reading specialist.

Houston parent Synda Frost echoed Ames by stating that some children are "disabled by instruction." She said she is "no longer moved by the common excuse given by schools that begins with, 'If only the parents would do their part.'" According to Frost, an effective school-based reading program would preclude any need for parental involvement in order to achieve reading success.

Informed instruction is key for reading achievement for all students, including learning disabled children, notes G. Emmerson Dickman, board member of the International Dyslexia Association. He also advocated early intervention, quoting Tom Hehir, Director of the Office of Special Education Programs in the U.S. Department of Education, who said, "Special education for pupils with learning disabilities in the United States is a wait and fail model."

In Louisiana, a 1991 law mandates identification and treatment of dyslexic students. However, staff development models were, and still are, desperately needed, said Mary Scherff, from the Louisiana State Board of Education. She urged the Panel to identify and distribute to schools information on reading programs appropriate for "normal readers, inadequate readers, dyslexic students, and special-education students."

For children whose primary language is not English, Lupita Hinojosa, President of the Texas Association for Bilingual Education, urged reading programs to begin in the child's first language. "Reading is reading is reading," she told the Panel. "In whatever language the children bring to the school, reading is reading and they will be able to read." She also urged the Panel to examine teacher-preparation programs and instructional materials that serve bilingual students.

The Paramount Task: Dissemination of Findings and Successful Practices

"How to deliver the goods in the professional development market" is a daunting task, but one that must top the Panel's agenda, according to Sheldon Horowitz of the National Center for Learning Disabilities. Most presenters concurred with the general sentiment that the Panel's greatest contribution would be to deliver a report that moves "beyond research" and tells educators and parents what steps to take to improve student reading achievement. However, they acknowledged that it is a formidable task to get the report into the hands of all the right people.

Broad distribution—not only to teachers, administrators and other policymakers, but also to parents—was the clarion call of most speakers. "Until

the parents are informed of what is happening in reading, I don't think we are going anywhere," cautioned Mississippi State Representative Rita Martinson.

Presenters in all regions of the country called upon the Panel to be aggressive and creative in the tactics used to disseminate the results of its study. Not only were Panel members counseled to address diverse audiences—parents, educators, members of the community, and business and civic leaders—they were encouraged to use a variety of media and tools to get out news and information of the findings.

Effective Programs Can Serve as Models for Dissemination Strategies

The Panel heard from a number of successful programs offered a series of initiatives and ideas that could be used as models for dissemination. These programs include:

- Reading is Fundamental
- Reading Recovery
- March of Dimes "Reading Champions"
- Start Making a Reader Today (SMART)
- Time Warner's "Time to Read"
- Project Read
- Success for All
- Reading Partners Clinic

Conclusion: What the Panel Learned From Local Meetings

The regional meetings provide opportunities for members of the National Reading Panel to move beyond the opinions and research findings offered by academic experts and quantitative studies. They allowed Panelists to hear the concerns of the Panel's target audiences—those who will be using and disseminating the Panel's findings. The meetings helped establish the Panel's work as a national effort to find the best ways to teach reading. And they widened the field of inquiry by treating parents, educators, and concerned members as valuable colleagues with information and experiences to contribute.

By leaving the confines of the nation's capital, the Panel heard the views of parents and teachers across the country who wanted the opportunity to "tell Congress how to teach reading." While most of these presenters were practitioners rather than researchers, their comments revealed a national concern with reading and great frustration with the way in which reading is

taught in many American schools. They asked the Panel to look at parent-volunteer programs and other initiatives that involve parents as teachers. Speakers also highlighted the importance of respecting the knowledge and work of teachers and listening to their views. These comments revealed that parents and educators want to help but need programs to help show them what to do. They also need to feel that their experience about the best methods and programs are incorporated into the final report.

Another key goal of the regional meetings was to evaluate schools' readiness to adopt the practices recommended by the Panel. Comments by speakers point to potential problems in this area. Several speakers indicated that there is no one right way to teach reading and supported individualized instruction, flexibility, and programs that address many learning styles. This opinion could prove problematic if educators' efforts to maintain a variety of methods that can be matched to students' learning styles cause them to continue using strategies without research verification. However, the comment that there is no teacher-proof method illustrates the need to incorporate teacher training and development into any dissemination plan.

The few speakers who addressed the issue of research found gaps between research to practice and a lack of a consistent model of learning, consistent definition of reading, and sufficient information on comprehension. Several speakers urged the panel to cast a broad net and take a "fresh look" at programs that work and skills not generally part of reading. Others called on the panel to step beyond research on reading to look toward big policy ideas that can help schools teach reading. This means the Panel needs to consider how its recommendations can fit into the existing structure of schools, or, alternatively, suggest other ways of organizing reading instruction based on its research into effective methods.

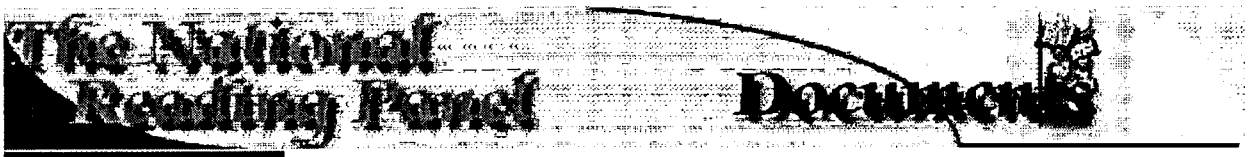
Similarly, comments indicated that the public still perceives a dispute between phonics and whole language that could inhibit their receptivity to the Panel's findings. Many speakers were strongly in support of phonics and a phonological approach. One speaker even directly said that the NRC report did not settle the "reading wars." These comments show that the phonics/whole language issue remains controversial and cannot be ignored. The Panel should be careful to make sure its report addresses the concerns of both sides of the "reading wars," while rising above the false dichotomy to help the American public realize the full spectrum of skills and approaches required to teach young people to be strong, effective lifelong readers.

Part of the National Reading Panel's charge is to disseminate its findings to facilitate effective reading instruction. Here the Panel can learn from the programs that have won the support of various presenters, ranging from nationally known programs such as Reading Is Fundamental and Reading Recovery to state programs, to local programs in schools. These are all examples of how specific ideas about how the best ways of teaching of reading have been disseminated through grassroots organizations and community-based programs. The Panel can build upon these models to develop a dissemination strategy that will incorporate its work into the very

fiber of daily life for parents, teachers, and students—while appropriately engaging policymakers, civic leaders, and elected officials as champions and supporters of improved reading instruction.

These Panel meetings created a body of qualitative research on the views and experiences of local experts, educators, parents, and others concerned about reading—providing an invaluable context for the research review and a guide for the development of dissemination strategies. While not a substitute for academic research, these local meetings gave the Panel an opportunity to hear the voices of those who will need to implement any recommendations developed by the Panel. As these meetings have shown, parents, educators, and members of the general public already have fixed ideas about reading, the needs of children and schools, and the best way to help children learn to read. They naturally will interpret the Panel's programs and suggestions in light of their own opinions and beliefs. Therefore, the Panel must demonstrate how its recommendations answer the questions and concerns of the American public. Similarly, dissemination strategies need to take into account the public's thoughts about current programs in order to convince them that the Panel's ideas are better.

The Panel's academic research showed what experts, experimenters, and scholars have learned about reading. But since most students are taught by parents and teachers, not experimenters and scholars, it was important for the Panel to reach out to Americans in diverse localities. In this way the Panel has begun fulfilling its mission of serving as the intermediary between researchers and the general public—between research-based knowledge and improvements in the practices that support effective teaching and learning in reading.



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CHARGE TO THE NATIONAL READING PANEL

The Congress of the United States, when it asked that the National Reading Panel be established, directed the Panel to "assess the status of research-based knowledge (of reading development and disability), including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read." Based on this assessment, the Panel is to "present a report to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Education, and the appropriate congressional committees. The report should present the Panel's conclusions, an indication of the readiness for application in the classroom of the results of this research, and, if appropriate, a strategy for rapidly disseminating this information to facilitate effective reading needed regarding early reading development and instruction.

A recent report by the National Research Council Committee on Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children summarized converging evidence on what must be in place for children to learn to read and on various approaches to reading instruction. This report provides a valuable foundation on which the National Reading Panel can build.

Accordingly, the Panel is charged to conduct an extensive and critical review, analysis, and synthesis of the research literature on how children learn to read, and on how the components of skilled reading behavior are developed by various approaches to reading instruction for children of differing backgrounds, learning characteristics, and literacy experiences. Taking into account the relevance, methodologic rigor and applicability, validity, reliability, and replicability of the reported research the Panel should address the following questions:

1. What is known about the basic process by which children learn to read?

2. What are the most common instructional approaches in use in the U.S. to teach children to learn to read? What are the scientific underpinnings for each of these methodologic approaches, and what assessments have been done to validate their underlying scientific rationale? What conclusions about the scientific basis for these approaches does the Panel draw from these assessments?

3. What assessments have been made of the effectiveness of each of these methodologies in actual use in helping children develop critical reading skills, and what conclusions does the Panel draw from these assessments?

4. Based on answers to the preceding questions, what does the Panel conclude about the readiness for implementation in the classroom of these research results?

5. How are teachers trained to reach children to read, and what do studies show about the effectiveness of this training? How can this knowledge be applied to improve this training?

6. What practical findings from the Panel can be used immediately by parents, teachers, and other educational audiences to help children learn how to read, and how can conclusions of the Panel be disseminated most effectively?

7. What important gaps remain in our knowledge of how children learn to read, the effectiveness of different instructional methods for teaching reading, and improving the preparation of teachers in reading instruction that could be addressed by additional research?

In carrying out this charge, the Panel shall use the means necessary to retrieve, review, and analyze the relevant research literature; seek information and viewpoints of researchers and other professionals in reading instruction as well as of teachers and parents; and exert its best efforts to complete its work of developing responses to the questions above and submit a final report by November 1998.

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