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## NEWS IN BRIEF

**BAXTER JOINS FIRST-EVER CONGRESSIONAL ROUNDTABLE ON LITERACY***Cong. Hinojosa Launches South Texas Literacy Coalition*

EDINBURG, TX – Dr. Sandra L. Baxter joined Congressman Rubén Hinojosa (D-TX) and other experts from the literacy community, the arts, and from higher education at the University of Texas-Pan American to talk about strategies for improving literacy and solutions across the lifespan and in South Texas communities. The March 28 Congressional Roundtable on Literacy in America, sponsored by Hinojosa, was one of the main events held in conjunction with the University's weeklong Festival of International Books & Arts known as FESTIBA. The first-ever Congressional Roundtable, held on National Librarians' Day, attracted more than 200 librarians, school administrators, community leaders, and university students and faculty.

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Dr. Sandra L. Baxter (left) and Dr. Blandina Cárdenas, president of University of Texas, Pan American joined Congressman Rubén Hinojosa (TX-15) in launching a major initiative to boost literacy in South Texas.

# Catalyst

A PUBLICATION FROM THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY

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## Spanish-Language Publication for Parents of Young Readers Among the Institute's New Titles

When the National Institute for Literacy expanded its offering of print publications for parents of preschool and K–3 children in 2006, *La Lectura es lo Primero (Put Reading First)*, its first-ever Spanish-language book, was among them. Today, as the need grows for Spanish-language publications and resources for families of K–3 children who are learning to speak and read in English, the Institute is working to create two new book titles to support parents and families. *La Lectura es lo Primero* ranks No. 1 in Spanish-language publications distributed by the U.S. Department of Education's clearinghouse (EdPubs) and is among its top 10 most-requested publications.

"The publications will introduce information about how K–3 children learn to read in a way that connects to Hispanic families' beliefs about the role of the family, community, and school in children's education," said Lynn Reddy, the Institute's deputy director. "We are working hard to use research findings as the basis of meaningful, culturally appropriate publications with Spanish-speaking families in mind," said Reddy of the Institute's vision for the new Spanish-language publications. Reddy, who is managing this publishing project, said the Institute expects that the publications will be developed organically rather than by using text that has been translated from existing English-language versions of its books. And like the Institute's other publications funded under No Child Left Behind, the foundation for these new Spanish-language books will rely on scientifically based research. The Institute



The Institute is developing two new titles to support Hispanic families with children in grades K-3.

awarded a contract to develop the new books to Macro International, Inc., a professional services firm with experience in developing outreach efforts to the Hispanic community on health issues.

Macro International tapped Johns Hopkins University scholar and researcher Dr. Margarita Calderón to be a part of the project's expert working group.

"I wanted to be a part of the Institute's working group because this is the first time that two such visible publications will be developed from a Hispanic/Latino perspective and from scratch," Calderón explained. "The involvement of families, educators, and policy makers in focus groups will ensure cultural and educational relevance in these publications."

Calderón has taught ESL and bilingual classes in elementary, middle, and high schools, and has published more than 100 books, journal articles, and manuals. She is a principal research scientist and professor for

*Continued on page 3*



Welcome to *Catalyst*, the first official newsletter for the National Institute for Literacy in more than a decade. Some of you may remember the early editions of *NIFL News* in the 1990s. Today we have a new name and new look to help us bring you the latest news and information from the Institute and from the literacy community.

The Institute is a small agency—13 staff members strong—but working to affect change on a massive scale. Within these pages you will learn about how we are carrying out the Institute's Federal mandate of helping the nation address some of its literacy challenges. While we know that this is an enormous undertaking, we are also humbled and motivated daily by the great potential the Institute's work has to impact the lives of millions of Americans. Working together with our Federal partners and drawing from examples of what works on the ground, the Institute is making meaningful contributions to literacy across the life span, from early childhood to adult education.

The Institute had the opportunity to work with ABC News correspondent Pierre Thomas and producer Jack Date to help bring to light the plight of the adult learner. The result was a two-part series that began on February 25. For many who viewed the World News Tonight segments *Coming Out of the Shadows: Illiteracy in America*, the compelling stories and voices of adult learners who had languished for years with a secret that kept them hostage, and the joy they found on the journey to literacy, were startling. One viewer posted this comment on the ABC Web site following the show: "Thank you ABC for bringing awareness to America's best-kept secrets. Adults with low literacy skills live in shame and fear of being 'found out.'" But for those of us on the front lines in the literacy community, the numbers, the faces of adults, youth and children, and the stories are all too familiar.

As the Institute looks ahead, we see where we need to go in the coming years to help ensure that our nation is in a more secure place when it comes to having a more literate citizenry. It can be done. Our country can truly be a land of opportunity, where education is the great equalizer and where everyone has the necessary tools to forge their hopes and dreams.

Sandra L. Baxter, Ed.D.  
Director, National Institute for Literacy

**CATALYST: CATA-LYST (kat-a-list) WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

Scientists know catalyst as "a substance that alters the speed of a chemical reaction and does not appear in the final product and undergoes no permanent changes; something that causes an important event to happen." What We Know: As an impartial, but important broker and catalyst, the National Institute for Literacy seeks solutions to improve literacy opportunities for adults, youth, and children across the lifespan. We have named this new publication *Catalyst* in the spirit of embracing our leadership, innovation, and energy in the field of literacy.

**Adult Reading Showcased During Live Webcasts**

The Institute kicked off 2008 with Part 2 of its live reading webcast, "From Assessment to Practice: Research-Based Approaches to Teaching Reading to Adults." In the January 11 program, expert guests Dr. John Kruidenier, Dr. Rosalind Davidson, and Ms. Susan McShane returned to present new instructional strategies for teaching fluency and vocabulary. In Part I, which aired in September 2007, Kruidenier, Davidson and McShane used two other components of reading—word analysis and comprehension—to illustrate research-based practices. They also explained how all four major components of reading provide a framework for assessing students' reading ability and ultimately for improving adult learners' reading skills.

"Through these discussions, we give literacy practitioners an opportunity not only to increase their knowledge, but also to raise the visibility of literacy and important related issues that are of concern to the wider community," said Dr. Sandra L. Baxter, Institute director, who moderated the webcasts. "Technology," Baxter added, "is one of the best ways for engaging and informing those in the field. And the ability to archive these programs on the Institute's Web site allows us to create instruction and information on demand." **To access the webcast:** [http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/lincs\\_media.html](http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/lincs_media.html).

Read what these experts had to say:



**DR. JOHN KRUIDENIER**  
*Researcher and Author of Teaching Adults to Read*

...[A] strong line of research clearly demonstrates that adult non-readers and beginning readers have almost no phonemic awareness or knowledge of the basic sounds in our language.

## UPDATE ON INSTITUTE PUBLICATIONS: TOP-RANKED PRODUCTS MEETING THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES, PRACTITIONERS

Translating research into high-quality resources for educators, parents and adult literacy providers has been a traditional strength of the Institute. And work this past fiscal year continued the Institute's record of achievement in this area. The Institute's publications continue to rank among the top 10 most requested publications in the inventory for EdPubs, the Institute's and Department of Education's national clearinghouse. The following books claimed the top five slots: *Put Reading First: A Parent Guide*; *Dad's Playbook: Coaching Kids to Read*; *A Child Becomes a Reader: Kindergarten Through Grade 3*; *Shining Stars: Kindergartners Learn to Read*; and *Put Reading First: The Teacher's Guide*.

The Institute released nine new publications in 2006–2007. *Q.Ed: Scientific Evidence for Adult Literacy Educators*, a newsletter for adult educators, was among them. The new *Shining Stars* series for parents also made its debut last year. The Institute's new brochure on scientifically based reading research summarizes the longer monograph on the same topic, making this important information even more accessible to teachers. *What Content-Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy*, published in October 2007, is filling an important gap in the literature on adolescent literacy. To learn more about these and other Institute publications or to order copies, visit <http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/publications.html>.

### *Institute's New Books Continued from Page 1*

the Center for Research and Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University, and is a co-principal investigator for the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) study on the transition from Spanish reading into English reading. She also serves on numerous panels and boards including the National Research Council's Committee on Teacher Preparation and the National Literacy Panel for Language Minority Children and Youth.

Reddy said plans to develop the publications include engaging key interest groups such as the National Council of La Raza. The Institute, created in 1991, has been publishing and disseminating early childhood publications for about six years through a process that begins with the findings from scientifically based research

on reading and includes expert involvement, focus groups and peer review. For the Spanish-language publications, two focus groups are planned that will include Spanish-speaking family members of K–3 children. The families will review and comment on the Spanish-language drafts of the two planned publications. ■

**We are working hard to use research findings as the basis of meaningful, culturally appropriate publications with Spanish-speaking families in mind.**

*Lynn Reddy, Deputy Director,  
National Institute for Literacy*

### *Roundtable Continued from Page 1*

## DR. ROSALIND DAVIDSON

### *Principal developer of the Adult Reading Components interactive Website.*

...As accomplished readers, we are often not aware of how much understanding of what we read comes from the information we have absorbed from extensive reading and experiences. We bring all of this information to new text.



**MS. SUSAN MCSHANE**  
*Reading Initiative  
Specialist at the  
National Center for  
Family Literacy*

Good readers actually work.... we read for meaning. If poor readers do not do that, which often they don't, we need to teach them some of the things that good readers do. That's what comprehension strategy instruction is all about.

"I was delighted to be a part of this historic and important literacy event. I applaud Cong. Hinojosa for bringing us together and for advancing literacy and learning across South Texas," said Baxter, who responded during the Congressional Roundtable to questions on challenges adult learners face and discussed the Institute's adult literacy research and publications.

The Roundtable marked the third time that Baxter has been invited to participate in a congressional event. In June 2007, she testified on adult literacy and workforce issues before the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor at the Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness. And in July of that year, Baxter presented adult literacy findings at the Congressional Black Caucus Education Summit co-chaired by Reps. Robert C. Scott and Danny K. Davis.

At the close of the Congressional Roundtable, Hinojosa announced the formation of the South

Texas Literacy Coalition, designed to enhance learning opportunities for the region by ensuring that all children and families have access to integrated literacy services and resources.

"Half of the adults over the age of 18 in our region do not have a high school diploma or GED. We are laying the groundwork so that this statistic will soon be obsolete," said Hinojosa.

In Texas, there are 3.3 million residents who have low-level literacy skills; 1 in 4 Texans lack basic reading and writing skills.

"It is vital to put printed material in the hands of our children and let them select the books they want to read," said Hinojosa, who announced that Coalition partner, Reading Is Fundamental, will help make book ownership a reality for many children in the region.

With a plan to give each child in the region three books a year, Hinojosa said, "I want to be remembered as the Congressman who gave them (children) their first book."



## UP CLOSE with Dr. Petrice Sams-Abiodun Lindy Boggs National Center for Community Literacy

*Two years ago, Hurricane Katrina left her family's home mired under six feet of water and uninhabitable after the storm. Today, Dr. Petrice Sams-Abiodun and her family are living in the basement apartment of a relative while coping with building contractors. But Sams-Abiodun, the executive director of the Lindy Boggs National Center for Community Literacy at Loyola University in New Orleans, remains hard at work on restoring vital adult literacy programs and struggling to rebuild her own life.*

Sams-Abiodun was a featured speaker at the National Institute for Literacy's Community Literacy Summit. In her presentation, she shared the compelling story of how the then president of Loyola University and public housing residents came together more than a decade ago to address issues of community literacy. The Boggs Center, which promotes adult literacy as a vehicle for personal, economic and community empowerment, is the result of the evolution of that university-community partnership that began in 1994. In this interview, Sams-Abiodun takes time to talk about the meaning of community literacy, the urgent need to restore literacy services in a city where 70 percent of the adult population in Greater New Orleans was reading at or below an eighth grade level before Hurricane Katrina, and hope and recovery post-Katrina.

### **Q: Describe the adult learners the Center supports?**

Sams-Abiodun: The Center does not provide direct services to adult learners. We serve more as a clearinghouse on issues of adult literacy. We see our role as building the community's capacity to address the issue of adult literacy. That means working with our adult service provider network and with other primary stakeholders on the issue. Given our mission, the Lindy Boggs Center convenes these stakeholders—provider networks,

government officials, K–12 institutions, community colleges, faith- and community-based organizations and others—to create the Literacy Alliance. The Alliance serves as the practitioner and the Boggs Center is more of a research institute. Together we conduct training, professional development and advocacy to build community capacity. The Boggs Center brings national best practices to bear in the community on adult literacy.

### **Q: While there is no one overarching definition in the field of community literacy, how is it understood in the context of the mission of the Lindy Boggs Center?**

Sams-Abiodun: At the Boggs Center, our mission and goal are to promote adult



In the Greater New Orleans area, we know that many people need literacy services. Pre-Katrina, 40 percent of adults were reading below a sixth-grade level; 30 percent of adults were reading between a sixth- and eighth-grade level. That means that 70 percent of the adult population in Greater New Orleans was reading at or below an eighth-grade level. And fewer than 8 percent were in traditional literacy programs. Given the immense number of low-literate individuals, we knew that we needed to go where adults were, since they were not coming to the traditional programs.

When we asked adults why literacy and literacy programs were important to them, most said to get a better job; to be

*When we came back after the storm, the focus was on rebuilding, helping children get back to school; it was about violence, but nobody was saying it was about literacy. No one was talking about literacy as a tool for rebuilding lives.*

literacy as a vehicle for personal, economic and community development. Community literacy is a tool that is used as a catalyst for institutional change and for building community capacity. It moves the focus beyond just providing programs.

able to support their families; to be able to read to their children; to take care of themselves physically; and to be able to read the Bible.

A lot of our work now (at the Boggs Center) focuses on workforce development

and on integrating literacy and competency into the workplace. New Orleans needs a more skilled workforce to attract industry to this area. This is so important to the recovery of the city. It is also just as relevant to residents who want to return and participate in the rebuilding and recovery of the city. I believe that education and literacy are important assets that will assist in the rebuilding of lives and this city.

**Q: How does the mission of the Boggs Center compare to other national literacy centers? And how do the unique culture, geography and racial composition of New Orleans influence your approach to community literacy?**

Sams-Abiodun: Given the economic disparities and the disproportionate poverty

problem here, especially for certain subgroups of the population.

We want to ultimately create a community of lifelong learners who view literacy as a continuum.

**Q: Two years after Katrina, how would you describe some of the new challenges literacy organizations are facing?**

Sams-Abiodun: I think about a program here called The Road Home, which gives money to help residents rebuild their homes. The application is a very intense and complicated process. Those who developed The Road Home program didn't anticipate that so many people wouldn't understand the application process. As a result, people from The Road Home program contacted us to help them address this issue. One of the

into the city for work, but now there are more women and children as well. The children are entering the school system. Women are using the health care system. Just about every organization and institution in the city must now be prepared to address this population of "new New Orleanians." The emerging Hispanic population must also be addressed by the adult literacy system.

**Q: What models of community literacy has the Boggs Center developed that other literacy organizations can use or emulate?**

Sams-Abiodun: Pre-Katrina, we put a lot of our efforts into service providers—developing the capacity of service providers, conducting professional development and training, collecting and sharing data—and we bought a lot of computer equipment in the hope that these service providers would be able to reach more people. Before the storm, we had about 43 literacy providers in the Greater New Orleans area. Now, post-Katrina, we have eight or 10 providers that are open and functioning. To some degree, all of the commitment and capacity-building efforts were decimated by the storm.

One important lesson learned is the importance of building different kinds of partnerships. We now have to partner with programs like The Road Home and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to support and reach the people who are trying to rebuild their lives. In the past, we were more focused on literacy and education programs. We also recognize that we need more literacy champions. When we came back after the storm, the focus was on rebuilding, helping children get back to school; it was about violence, but nobody was saying it was about literacy. No one was talking about literacy as a tool for rebuilding lives.

That is why we need more people who are not in the literacy field but who have the power and the influence to change things that impact the population that we are working with. ■

*When we asked adults why literacy and literacy programs were important to them, most said to get a better job; to be able to support their families; to be able to read to their children; to take care of themselves physically; and to be able to read the Bible.*

in the state, you also have to take into consideration the unique geographic and racial makeup here and the strong cultural element. When I look across the nation at what other literacy centers are doing, I think that we do things that are comparable—a strong focus on adult education and instructional methods.

What I think is unique at the Boggs Center is what we have done to understand the impact that poverty and race have on creating and perpetuating the adult literacy problem. For example, our education system ranks worst in the nation and perpetuates the issue of adult literacy. So, unless we are able to change and strengthen our K–12 system, we will continually have this adult literacy problem. It's a vicious cycle. For us the work of literacy must include system change of the institutions and processes that perpetuate the

challenges residents face is how to respond to and navigate complex and technical jargon found on many of the applications. The process is especially difficult for people who have basic or low literacy skills.

**Q: How would you describe some of the challenges that the Boggs Center and other literacy organizations in the city are grappling with since the hurricane?**

Sams-Abiodun: Many adult literacy programs have not returned since the flood, and many will not. Another challenge is obtaining reliable, current and comprehensive data on the whereabouts of evacuees. There are some significant demographic shifts emerging. Our city is now more male than female. There is an increase in the Hispanic population, which is very new for this region. At first we saw a lot of Hispanic men coming

# Adolescent Literacy Report Serving as a Ready Resource for Teachers

While the nation's adolescents will need to achieve higher levels of literacy than previous generations, nearly 9 million fourth- through 12th-graders are struggling with reading and writing, according to *What Content-Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy*, a new report released by the National Institute for Literacy.

Without intervention, these adolescents will be at risk of dropping out of school. "Many will be forced to face an increasingly competitive and literate world where the ability to read and to write are necessities for success at home, in the workplace and in society," said Institute director Dr. Sandra L. Baxter.

The 61-page report summarizes some of the current literature on adolescent literacy research and practice and also suggests some methods of building adolescent reading and writing skills in the classroom. A preview copy of the report was issued in 2006. One feature of the 2007 report is an expanded reference section that includes work in adolescent literacy published since 2006.

The new report found that middle school and high school students across socioeconomic levels struggle with learning academic content because they cannot read and write at grade level. Teachers should use systematic, explicit and direct instruction to help these students, according to the report, which was developed by the Institute, the U.S. Department of Education and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

Many middle school and high school teachers, however, have little or no preparation for teaching these skills within

their content-area disciplines. The purpose of the report is to give content-area teachers information, tools and resources (including specific examples found in the appendix) to help them become part of the literacy solution in their schools.

"We are not expecting content-area teachers to teach reading to each student in their classrooms. We recognize that their job is to teach the content material. However, the report provides useful literacy background knowledge as well as resources for the

content-area teacher," explained Tanya Shuy, the Institute's former senior program officer for Adolescent Literacy and Learning Disabilities.

And the information provided in the report will be welcomed, say those in the literacy

community. "It's clear to me from my experience with Striving Readers projects that the people implementing adolescent literacy programs are ready for information about the role of content-area teachers in teaching literacy skills," says Marcia Kingman, who oversees the Striving Readers grants for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. "I think the Institute does a good job of providing theory and practice in a tone that is not condescending to teachers and is rich with information that teachers will value," adds Kingman about the report.

The report, a summary of the current literature on adolescent literacy research and practice, suggests some methods of building adolescent reading and writing skills in

the classroom. "Lower literacy skills hold students back and are a major barrier to their learning academic content," said Brett Miller, a program official in reading research at the NICHD. "This report offers concrete advice on how teachers can strengthen their student's literacy skills in tandem with their content-area instruction." The NICHD, the U.S. Department of Education, and other organizations currently sponsor long-term research studies that ultimately will add to knowledge in the field of adolescent literacy.

## WHAT DO GOOD READERS DO?

For teachers with struggling readers, Shuy offers this advice: "It is important to refer students who need more help to the special education teacher, reading specialist or literacy coach because it is not expected that content-area teachers will provide this specialized instruction."

In addition, the report tackles issues related to literacy instruction at the secondary level, including reading assessments, writing and motivation, and it provides strategies for helping learners from diverse family backgrounds, those with learning disabilities or those from various cultural, linguistic or socioeconomic backgrounds. These strategies include presenting text and ideas in different ways; breaking down literacy and content instruction into "smaller chunks;" providing extended talk time, particularly to those who are learning English or who speak a nonstandard dialect of English; modeling and providing instruction in academic English; and talking with students individually about what they are learning and encouraging them to explain and clarify their thoughts.

The report, *What Content-Area Teachers Should Know About Adolescent Literacy*, is available online at the Institute's Web site ([www.nifl.org](http://www.nifl.org)), or order it by contacting the Institute's clearinghouse, EDPubs, at 1-800-228-8813 (TDD/TTY 1-877-576-7734); by e-mailing [edpubs@inet.ed.gov](mailto:edpubs@inet.ed.gov), or faxing 1-301-470-1244. ■

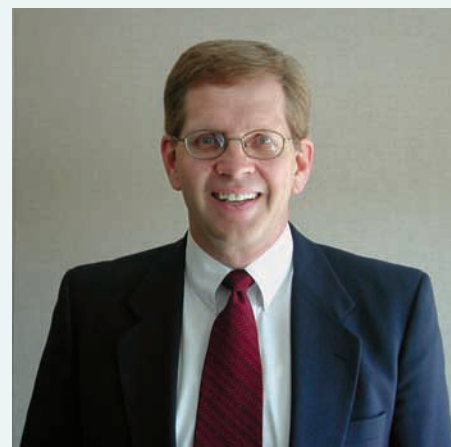


## An Interview with Author Dr. Don Deshler

While middle school and high school administrators and teachers share concern over adolescent literacy, they often work “in isolation” within their own schools to find solutions, according to *Informed Choices for Struggling Adolescent Readers: A Research-Based Guide to Instructional Programs and Practices*. In the 255-page book, the authors provide educators with a national context on adolescent literacy, along with resources and best practices that support struggling readers. We spoke with Deshler, one of the book’s co-authors. Deshler is also a member of the National Institute for Literacy’s Advisory Board and a professor in the School

of Education at the University of Kansas, where he directs the Center for Research on Learning. in secondary schools, they’ve got the necessary literacy skills. Although educators have some promising practices for teaching younger children how to read, there are many schools that aren’t using them or using them effectively. As a result, we have thousands of children who pass through those early years and don’t get the high-quality literacy instruction they need. In addition, certain students may have been successful in decoding words in the early grades. But as learners move from grade three to four and the curriculum changes, and the emphasis moves to comprehension, vocabulary and speed, they may not have the array of skills and strategies that will help them to be successful.

and high school they have acquired the necessary literacy skills. At the secondary level, there is so much content that must be taught; plus there is the pressure of state competency exams that teachers constantly feel. While not every teacher is a reading teacher, every teacher can play an important role to improve the literacy skills of students.



**Q: The book advocates increased time for literacy during the school day. What do you say to educators who fear that this would take away from instructional time for other content areas?**

**A:** That’s a huge dilemma; however, if there are students who have moved from kindergarten through the elementary grades, and now they’re in sixth or seventh grade and can’t read well, they will not be successful in comprehending the curriculum unless we find a way to deal with their literacy issues. For students who are so far behind, perhaps by three or four grade levels, there has to be an opportunity for them to close that gap through intensive, explicit and direct instruction. It is a real challenge for school administrators to find time in the school schedule to provide the kind of intensive instruction that struggling adolescent readers need. For students who are considerably behind their grade level, it may be necessary to provide them with a supplemental reading class with reduced numbers of students where they can receive targeted reading instruction. All teachers in a secondary school,

however, can play an important role in improving literacy skills for adolescents by modeling for them various strategies that can be used to more effectively read and learn critical information. It is also important to make connections between what is being taught in supplemental reading classes and what is being taught in the subject matter classes by having teachers do some co-planning.

**Q: You write about the need for a “school improvement team” to tackle literacy achievement. How can this contribute to student success?**

**A:** Schools need a literacy team that brings together key teachers and administrators, who identify those students who have literacy difficulties and together determine which ones should be targeted for literacy improvement.

**Q. What other advice do you have for educators as they address adolescent literacy and struggling readers?**

**A.** I’ve been working in this area nearly 40 years. I have been convinced that high-quality instruction from a team of teachers can make a world of difference in the life of a student. ■

*As a nation, we have largely ignored the acquisition of reading skills in the upper grades.*

of Education at the University of Kansas, where he directs the Center for Research on Learning.

**Q: You write: “Poor literacy skills are all too common in America’s schools.” From your findings, it appears that there is support for third-graders, but that there is a “well-documented ‘reading slump’ that occurs in U.S. schools after fourth grade.” Why is that?**

**A:** As a nation, we have largely ignored the acquisition of reading skills in the upper grades. The prevailing assumption has been that if students arrive

**Q: Can you describe some of the other factors that compound the problem of a gap in reading skills for adolescents?**

**A:** The root of the problem of adolescent literacy is often the way in which teachers and administrators in secondary education are prepared in their university training. Often, very little or no attention is given to issues surrounding problems of adolescent literacy and strategies for addressing these problems when they are encountered in the classroom. There is a prevailing assumption that by the time students arrive in middle school



## Regional Summits Convene Health and Literacy Providers

Health literacy is often defined as the ability to read, understand and act upon health-related information. But for many millions of adults with low literacy levels, health and health care can be life or death issues.

The state of health literacy, and strategies for helping adult learners and medical patients with low-level literacy skills cope at home and in the doctor's office, were the focus of three national summits convened in February and March by the National Institute for Literacy's Literacy Information and Communications System (LINCS) Regional Resource Centers. LINCS is the backbone of the Institute's dissemination system, providing information on a wide variety of topics, issues and resources relevant to literacy.

The summits, held in San Francisco, Atlanta, and Indianapolis, brought together literacy practitioners, health care providers, and educators, who shared information about health literacy research and discussed opportunities for partnerships that could help eliminate literacy barriers to accessing quality health care.

## Parents Partner with School Districts in Two-City Literacy Pilot Project

The Institute launched a two-city literacy training pilot project to actively engage parents in learning simple, effective strategies that they can use with their K–3 children at home. Support and interest from teachers and administrators in the pilot sites—Somerville Public Schools (Massachusetts) and Warwick Public Schools (Rhode Island)—have been positive. The parent-focused training materials will incorporate scientifically based reading research and will use existing Institute booklets. The project, launched in February, will train teachers and other educators from these school districts to lead the 12-week parent sessions, which are expected to run through May.

## ABC World News Series on Adult Literacy Sparked Awareness, Offered Overdue Look at Problem

Millions of adults in America are living daily with a troubling secret—they aren't able to read or write at a level that allows them to function in society, to achieve their goals or to develop their knowledge and potential.

For those working on the frontlines of literacy and on adult education, however, neither these adults nor their numbers are new. But for many who viewed the two-part ABC World News Tonight series on February 25 and 26, the numbers of adults in the nation who can't read or write or whose literacy skills are marginal at best, were "staggering and unbelievable." One viewer posted this comment on the ABC Web site following the show: "Thank you ABC for bringing awareness to America's best-kept secrets. Adults with low literacy skills live in shame and fear of being 'found out.'"

Part one of the ABC News series focused on Monica Baxley, a resident of the Florida panhandle who learned to read at age 41, and on the national problem of illiteracy, including that "an estimated 30 million people in the U.S. cannot read a simple sentence."

For Marty Finsterbusch, the series provided a boon to the adult literacy and education field.

"The ABC News special was good in that it brought needed attention and public awareness to the issue of literacy in a way that we haven't had in many years," added Finsterbusch, executive director of Voice for Adult Literacy United for Education (VALUE), a national organization of the alumni of adult literacy education programs. Finsterbusch, a former National Institute for Literacy Fellow, and an alumni of adult literacy programs himself, said VALUE's members are men and women who are learning—or have learned—to read, write, or speak English as adults. VALUE is operated by adult learners.

The series, *Living in the Shadows: Illiteracy in America and Out of the Shadows:*

*Overcoming Illiteracy*, "was brief, but what it covered was real," said Dr. David J. Rosen, moderator of the Institute's Special Topics Discussion List and adult literacy expert.

When national ABC News Reporter Pierre Thomas and his Producer Jack Date set out to showcase the lives of low literacy adults, they turned to the Institute for information and resources. An interview with Institute Director Dr. Sandra L. Baxter appeared in part one of the series. The story took ABC to Grand Rapids, Mich., a city of 184,000, where Thomas found that one out of every five residents has difficulty reading or cannot read at all. They asked Susan Ledy, executive director of the Literacy Center of West Michigan, why?

"It's really the root cause of many issues," Ledy told ABC. "And if we can solve the problem at the root cause level, think of all the changes that we'll make in terms of crime, economics, poverty. It really is so intertwined with all of those issues," Ledy added. Grand Rapids, she said, "is a good example of solutions to the problem because a lot of things are going on and it has a mayor who publicly challenged us to reduce our illiteracy rate."

At a time when millions of adults still cannot read above a basic level and even more cannot perform simple, everyday quantitative literacy tasks required in this society, Baxter called the ABC News series "an unprecedented opportunity for those in the literacy community to unveil the extent of a problem that many in the nation thought had gone the way of the horse and buggy."

"It's not too late to change this picture," said Dr. Troy Justesen, Assistant Secretary of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education at the U.S. Department of Education. "Investing in adult literacy is a strong partnership among local, state, and national programs," Justesen added. "Adults who can read and read well are critical to a strong economy." ■



## Institute Teams Up with National Mentoring Movement, Mocha Moms, Inc.

Institute Director, Dr. Sandra L. Baxter, launched partnerships with two national organizations—an African-American mentoring initiative and a support group for more than 3,000 mothers of color. Through innovative collaborations with the new National CARES Mentoring Movement, spearheaded by former *Essence* magazine Editor Susan L. Taylor, and with Mocha Moms, Inc., the Institute is serving as an expert resource on literacy and extending its reach into communities of color.

In January, the Institute and Mocha Moms, Inc., announced the beginning of a partnership to support early literacy at home. Many Mocha Moms members have chosen not to work full-time outside the home in order to devote more time to their families.

As part of the agreement, the Institute and Mocha Moms will kick off a yearlong national “Take Your Child to the Library Day” campaign to help foster a love of books and reading and to encourage at least 500 children in each of the target cities to apply for library cards. The Institute will also support Mocha Moms’ efforts to increase the number of parents who read to their children while visiting beauty salons and barbershops. Institute publications will be among the books available to parents and children in designated reading corners of the shops. Moms members in 35 states have already received packets of the Institute’s early childhood publications.

In October, Mocha Moms in the Southeast Regional Chapter invited Baxter to keynote its Education Summit in Atlanta. “Closing the Gap on Minority Achievement” is the organization’s national community service initiative. Baxter has also been asked to address the Northeast Region’s Mocha Moms Education Summit this summer.

Since beginning its partnership with the National CARES Mentoring Movement



Partnerships Flourish; Dr. Sandra L. Baxter (center) and B. Denise Hawkins (second from right), the Institute’s Communications Director, are joined by Mocha Moms officer, Shenja Kirkland (second from left) and Mocha Moms members at the Southeast Regional Education Summit in Atlanta. Susan L. Taylor (insert photo) is spearheading a national mentoring movement that is incorporating literacy.

(formerly called Essence CARES Mentoring Movement) nearly a year ago, the Institute has had the opportunity to distribute its first national full-page advertisement and an 8-page insert featuring a handy reading checklist for parents to more than 1.5 million *Essence* readers. The magazine is considered the leading lifestyle magazine for African-American women. The theme for both products was *Literacy Begins at Home*.

Says the initiative’s Taylor: “Essence CARES, the call to action to secure vulnerable African-American children, has grown into the National CARES Mentoring Movement, the largest mentor-recruitment initiative in the history of the nation. The guidance and support of Dr. Sandra Baxter and the National Institute for Literacy staff has made it possible for us to equip volunteer mentors and our national partner organizations with expert advice and resources on how to use literacy and reading to help secure the future of our youth.”

When Taylor appeared on a May

episode of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, which featured national mentoring programs and recruitment, she invited Baxter to be a part of the show. The Institute, in conjunction with Taylor, produced a highly successful *Literacy and Mentoring Guide* that is available to the public through EdPubs, distributed nationally to the initiative’s volunteer mentors, and to its partners including the National Urban League, the YWCA USA, The Links Inc., and 100 Black Men of America, Inc. Oprah plugged the *Guide* on the segment—viewed by more than 18 million viewers in 123 countries—and credited the work of the Institute. Baxter has appeared with Taylor in cities across the country to provide information on reading and literacy to packed audiences and in communities launching their own CARES Mentoring programs. To see a copy of the *Guide* visit the Institute’s website [www.nifl.gov](http://www.nifl.gov). To learn more about the National CARES Mentoring Movement or to become a mentor, contact Paul Gouridine, the national coordinator at (404) 584-2744. ■

## New Institute Staff Members Welcomed



**B. DENISE HAWKINS**  
*Associate Director, Communications*

Ms. Hawkins joined the staff

of the National Institute for Literacy in February 2007. An award-winning journalist, her stories have been published by Religion News Service, The Syracuse *Post-Standard*, The Washington Post, The Baltimore Sun, Today's Christian magazine and Howard University magazine. Ms. Hawkins has held senior-level public relations positions with two Washington, D.C., firms specializing in higher education and health disparities. The Baltimore native earned her bachelor's degree in journalism from Howard University and her master's degree in journalism from The Pennsylvania State University.



**KEITH SMILEY**  
*Contract Specialist*

Mr. Smiley joined the staff in 2006. Prior to coming to the Institute,

he was with ComTech Communications Technologies, a broadband services and information technology company. While at ComTech, he developed a viable contracts department by implementing a systematic contract administration plan to support program managers in preparing, negotiating and maintaining government and commercial contracts. Mr. Smiley earned a bachelor's degree in business management from Howard University and holds a master's certificate in government contracts from ESI International.

volunteer tutor and a teacher's aide in a variety of adult literacy program settings. Before joining the Institute in 1999, Ms. Reddy worked in public affairs at the U.S. Department of Defense, and prior to that she was press secretary for the House Armed Services Committee and for Representative Les Aspin of Wisconsin. She holds a bachelor's degree from Duke University and master's degrees in education and public administration from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education and the Kennedy School of Government, respectively.

### **SUSAN BOORSE**

#### ***Executive Officer, Budget/Administration***

Prior to joining the Institute as executive officer responsible for budget and administration, Ms. Boorse was an administrative officer and budget analyst for the Peace Corps. She also served four years as a VISTA volunteer, working with a literacy program in Philadelphia, a rural school district in Mississippi and a fledgling Habitat for Humanity affiliate in Philadelphia. She earned an undergraduate in urban studies from Temple University and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Missouri at Kansas City. Ms. Boorse has more than 20 years of experience in the Federal government.

## Meet the Institute Staff

### **SANDRA L. BAXTER**

#### ***Director***

After joining the Institute in 1999, Dr. Baxter was designated interim director in 2001 and appointed director in June 2005. Under Dr. Baxter's guidance, the Institute has undertaken new work on early childhood, adolescent and adult reading. Previously, she directed the Institute's national reading research dissemination campaign, The Partnership for Reading, which is a collaborative effort of the Institute, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Prior to joining the Institute, Dr. Baxter was a senior evaluator at the U.S. General

Accounting Office, where her work focused on federal education policy and programs. She began her career working in community-based programs for disadvantaged youth and adults, where she advised students on college admissions and financial aid requirements. A graduate of Howard University, she holds a master's degree from Loyola College in Baltimore and a doctoral degree in education from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

### **LYNN REDDY**

#### ***Deputy Director***

Ms. Reddy manages several contracts designed to raise awareness and disseminate information about scientifically based reading research. She has more than 11 years' experience as a

### **KATRINA LANCASTER**

#### ***Management and Operations Specialist***

Ms. Lancaster joined the Institute staff in March 2000 as a management and operations specialist, responsible for a variety of administrative matters, including invoices and budget and procurement documents.

### **SUZANNE RANDAZZO**

#### ***Management and Program Analyst***

Rejoining the Institute staff in 2001, Ms. Randazzo is a management and program analyst in the Executive Office. Previously she worked for the Institute from January 1992 to October 1999, when she transferred to the National Commission on Library and Information Services. Ms. Randazzo is responsible for a variety of administrative

matters and manages travel arrangements for staff, Advisory Board members and other invited participants. She has more than 20 years of experience as a career federal employee.

#### **ANDREA GRIMALDI**

##### **Senior Program Officer, Early Childhood Literacy**

Prior to joining the Institute, Ms. Grimaldi served as the training manager for professional development within the Public Broadcasting Service's Ready To Learn initiative and worked at Zero To Three in the Center for Program Excellence, providing training and technical assistance to care providers working with infants, toddlers and their families. She has taught in many early childhood education settings in the Washington, D.C., area, New Jersey and London, England. Ms. Grimaldi holds a bachelor's degree from Marymount University and a master's degree from Bank Street College of Education, with a specialization in early childhood leadership.

#### **JO MARALIT**

##### **Senior Program Officer, Technology**

Ms. Maralit joined the Institute in 2003. She works on the Institute's technology-related projects, including the Literacy Information and Communications System. Previously, she taught for four years in the District of Columbia Public School System, where her interest in how technology can facilitate teaching and learning began. Ms. Maralit received her undergraduate degree in education from The George Washington University and a master's degree in technology in education from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

#### **SHELLY COLES**

##### **Management and Program Analyst**

Ms. Coles joined the Institute in 1998. She is currently the assistant to the director and programs of the Institute. In this capacity, Ms. Coles provides advice to the director and assists senior project officers in administering and managing their programs and contracts. She has worked in both the Federal govern-

ment and the private sector, having held positions in the U.S. Department of State, National Research Council and the National Governors' Association.

#### **STEVE LANGLEY**

##### **Staff Assistant**

Mr. Langley responds to requests for literacy information, serves as liaison to the Institute's Advisory Board and performs other administrative duties. Prior to joining the Institute in 1997 as a staff assistant, he was a copy editor for *The Charlotte Observer* in North Carolina, *Insight* magazine and the *Congressional Quarterly* in Washington, D.C.

#### **DARLENE MCDONALD**

##### **Management and Program Analyst**

Ms. McDonald assists the communications director in processing all the Institute's publications. Previously, she served as administrative assistant in grants and procurement. Prior to joining the Institute in 1992, she held grants and contracts positions with the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education. She has more than 18 years of experience as a career Federal employee.

#### **JAMES "JIM" B. WILLIAMS**

##### **On Loan to The Institute from The Office of Vocational and Adult Education**

Jim Williams began a yearlong detail at the Institute on April 14, 2008. Williams, on loan from the Department of Education, Office of Adult and Vocational Education (OVAE) where he served since 2002, worked most recently in the Accountability and Performance Branch as the Principal Advisor to the Branch Chief. The Branch collected data on the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Program.

Before joining OVAE, Williams was the Principal Advisor to the Director of the Department's Center for Rural Education. He has also served in other supervisory and expert consultant capacities in the Federal government and in higher education.

*To Our Readers,*

*Welcome to the inaugural issue of Catalyst, a quarterly newsletter from the Institute's Communications Office. Catalyst contains news, information, and features about the programs and services of the National Institute for Literacy. Catalyst is published for the Institute's constituents.*

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#### **About the National Institute for Literacy:**

The National Institute for Literacy is authorized and mandated under the No Child Left Behind Act to work on helping children, youth and adults to become successful readers. Under this authorization, the Institute's efforts include supporting scientifically based reading research and disseminating information on reading across the lifespan. In consultation with the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, the Institute serves as a national resource on literacy expertise, research, policy, and practice.

#### **Read Catalyst online at:**

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