Becoming a Community of Middle Grades Readers
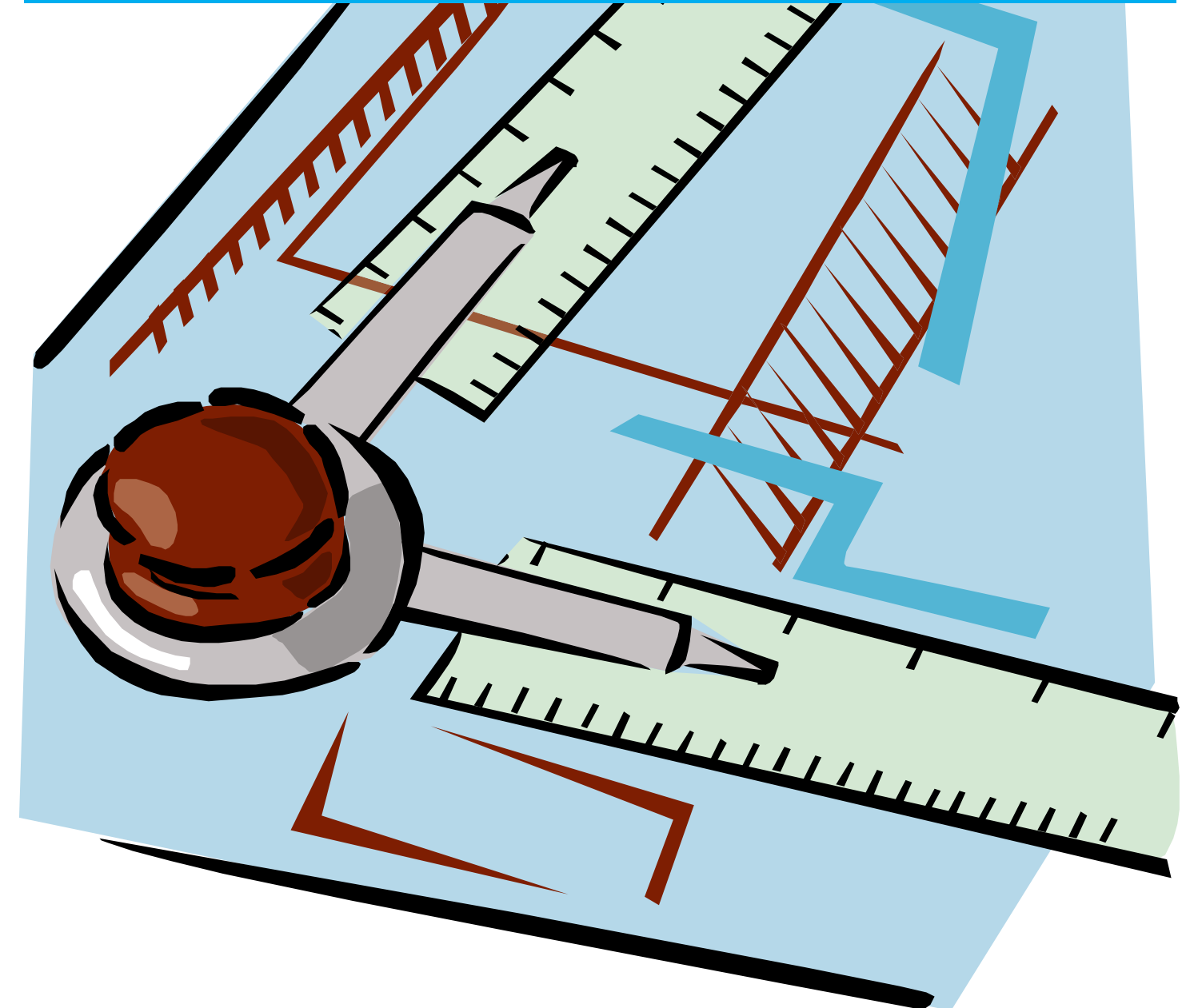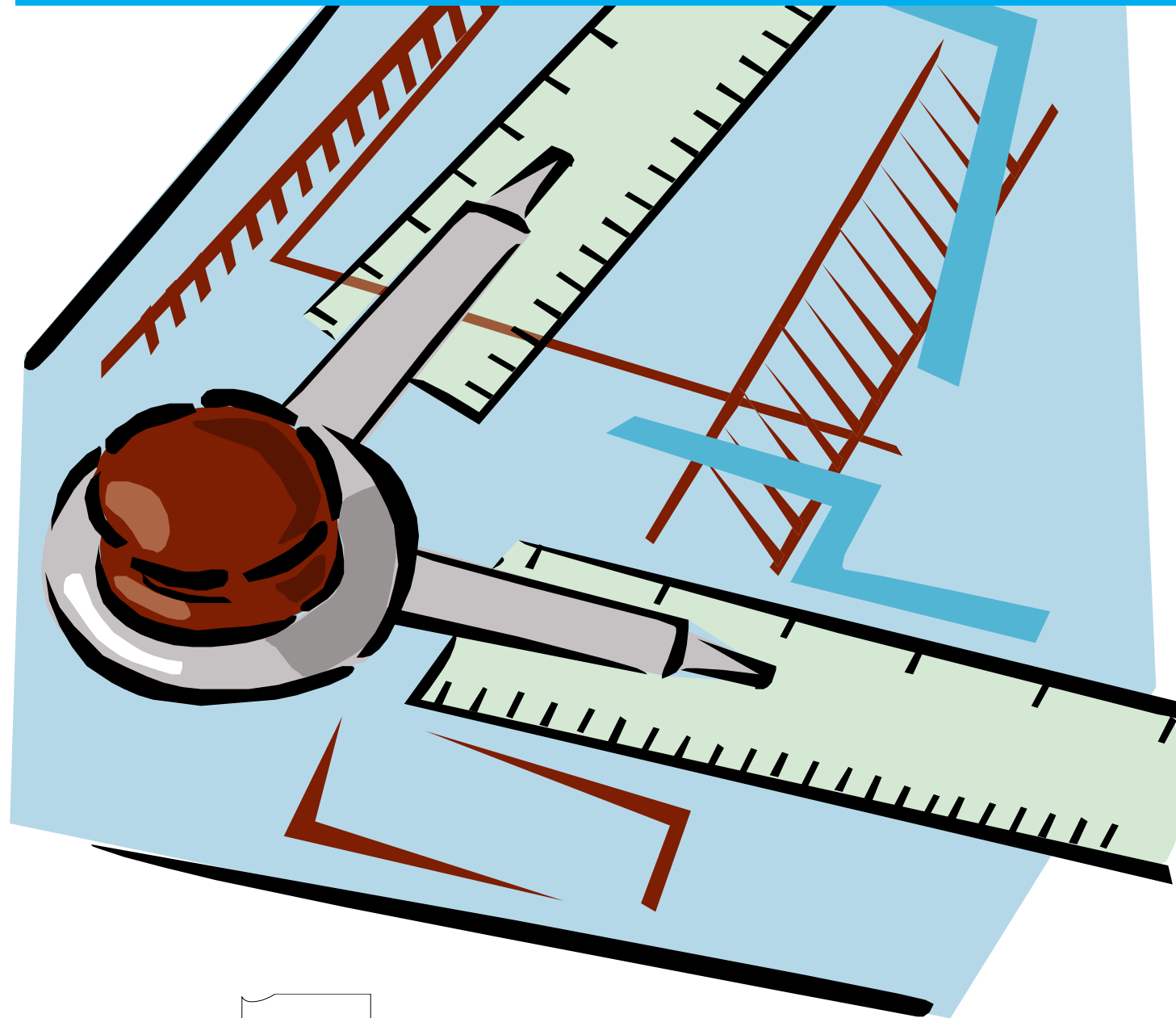
Middle Grades Reading Network
University of Evansville

A Blueprint for Indiana

April 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CALL FOR ACTION

The *Blueprint* describes the actions we need to take if we are to nourish Indiana's young adolescents so that they will be able to develop their reading skills to their full potential. This document spells out the ways that we can make books available, provide middle grades students with the time for reading, provide access to reading materials for instruction and practice, offer role models, and develop reading programs that are based on the best research available. It discusses the ways that school, community, and family can become partners in meeting these goals.

Because we live in a society in which reading demands are constantly escalating, it is critical that we give careful consideration to the recommendations of the *Blueprint*. Without our attention to the calls for action in this document, many Hoosier middle grades students will not have the support and encouragement to become successful, lifelong readers. And without our dedicated commitment, "*Houston, we have a problem*" will still ring true in regard to middle grades reading in Indiana. We absolutely cannot afford to allow that to happen.

Indiana's young adolescents deserve Communities of Readers in which all adults—in school, at home, and across the community—serve as role models and provide guidance to ensure that reading is a priority in young people's lives.

Goals

1. The oldest students in the school are reading role models for younger students.

2. The school library media specialist, principal, and teachers are reading role models for students.

3. Books are available for staff members to read in the school.

4. School librarians and teachers belong to reading discussion groups.

5. The school features reading role models with posters in halls and other locations.

6. Young adolescents, families, non-traditional educators, and members of the school staff use the public library.

7. The school has a Newspaper In Education program where teachers help students to become lifelong newspaper readers.

8. Educators frequently visit the public library and school library available to their students to speak with librarians, become aware of materials suitable for their students, and talk to their students about books.

Current Status

1. Many students read less as they get older.

2. Many schools have collections of books for faculty members to read. Most are donated by faculty members, but some schools provide new books for adults in their school libraries.

3. Many teachers belong to book discussion groups, some with other teachers, and some with other community members.

4. Many teachers have never been in the public library used by their students.

5. Most Indiana newspapers have Newspaper In Education programs available for schools.

Actions Needed

1. Use older students to promote reading by featuring them with books on posters or by presenting programs to younger students.

2. Start Teachers Under Cover or similar book groups in which school librarians and teachers read and discuss books.

3. Start a reading collection with books for members of the school staff.

4. Provide for regularly scheduled visits to the local public library to encourage student use of the library.

5. Work with the local newspaper to start a Newspaper In Education program.

Becoming a Community of Middle Grades Readers
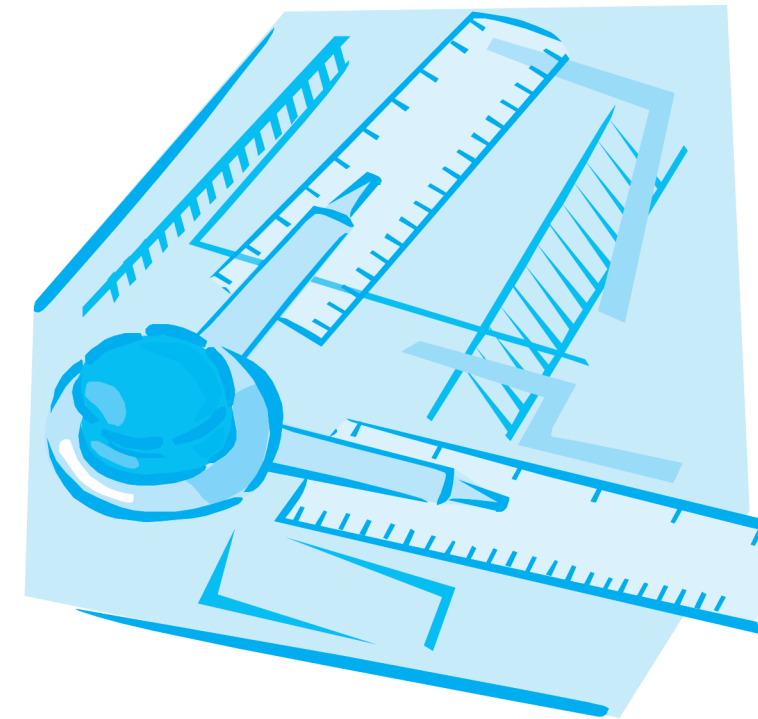
A Blueprint for Indiana

April 2009

Middle Grades Reading Network

BECOMING A COMMUNITY OF MIDDLE GRADES READERS: A BLUEPRINT FOR INDIANA

"Houston, we have a problem" is

a statement that found its way into the American lexicon by way of the Apollo 13 space mission. Now used to report any kind of trouble, it was originally spoken to communicate a technical problem threatening to strand our astronauts in space in 1970. It truly is not a stretch to use those famous words now to describe the problem that plagues middle grades readers in the state of Indiana. For a variety of reasons, too many young adolescents are not readers. Some may say we are powerless to change this abysmal situation, that the appeal of computers and techno miracles is simply too enticing, and that we cannot expect young adolescents to be satisfied with books. We are not powerless, but we have to be willing to take immediate action and remain committed to programs in our schools that truly will result in creating a Community of Readers.

In July 1993, over seventy youth advocates from across Indiana gathered at Brown County State Park to begin the task of forging a blueprint to create a Community of Readers. From this effort emerged the first draft of the *Blueprint*. In February 1995, a second Indiana Reading Stakeholders' meeting was held in Indianapolis that included teachers, principals, superintendents, library media specialists, public librarians, community-based agency youth professionals, parents, business leaders, and members of the Indiana State Department of Education. This group approved the final draft of the *Blueprint*.

The following 107 youth advocates participated in the two meetings: Dr. Mary Albright, Phyllis L. Amick, Dr. James Auter, Dr. Kevin Sue Bailey, Eileen Baker, Tommie Barnes, Fred Bechtold, Beth Berghoff, Sue Blackwell, Dr. Paul Blohm, Celestine Bloomfield, Tinka Booe, Deborah Bova, Dr. Rexel Brown, Geri Bradford, Dana Burton, Ronald Bush, Dr. Daniel Callison, Patty Callison, Nancy Cammack, Linda Cornwell, Joy Corsette, Dorothy Crenshaw, Dr. Shara Curry, Annette Demaree, Dr. Dave Dickson, Dr. Tracy Dust, Dr. Janet Emerick, Dan Endris, Dr. Shirley Fitzgibbons, Lauralee Foerster, Brenda Frazier-Christie, Dr. Penny Gaither, Dr. Cindy Gillespie, Angela J. Green, Ieva Grundy, Dr. Joyce Hamon, Thalia Hanna, Dr. Lee Harman, Sharon Harvey, Donald Hillyard, Dr. Earlene Holland, Betty Johnson, Dr. Sandra Kelly, Marge Keltner, Kathie Kerkhoff, Mary Kikta, Linda Kolb, Kate Gill Kressley, Eden Kuhlenschmidt, Dr. Joan Lipsitz, Beverly Martin, JoAnna McDonald, Dr. Jack McGovern, Britt Mikulyuk, Linda Mills, Connie Mitchell, Dr. G. W. Montgomery, Marlene Montgomery, Barbara Moore, Lou Ann Moore, Trish Morita-Mullaney, Jacqueline Morris, Jacqueline Mossburg, Ronald L. Mullett, Ellen Munds, Sandy Nolan, Jerry Nugent, Brian O'Neill, Amy Oxley, Earl E. Pfettscher, Barbara Poore, Barbara Putrich, Martha Randall, Anne Raymer, John Raymer, Dr. Suellen Reed, Samual A. Roberts, Andy Rodriguez, Norma Rogers, Shirley Ross, Eugenia Sacopulos, Carolyn Scavone, Janet Sherwood, Karen Sipes, Don M. Small, Dr. Carl Smith, Dr. Linda Snyder, Lianne Somerville, Darla Staley, Dr. Nancy Steffel, Gail Thomas Strong, Sue Switzer, Mary Swope, Lynn G. Sygiel, Phil Talbert, Clayton Taylor, Ralph Taylor, Dr. Roger Thornton, Lynda Vaughn, Janie B. Whaley, Roger Whaley, Linda Whikehart, Dr. Eugene White, Dr. Larry Williams, and Dr. Martha Zetzl.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Indiana's young adolescents deserve opportunities for reading at home and support from schools, public libraries, and community agencies to families with young adolescents to encourage family reading activities.

Goals

1. Schools use their Web sites to promote reading to families.

2. Students and their family members have public library cards and use them at their public library.

3. Families read and discuss newspaper content.

4. Families are encouraged to provide reading opportunities for their children at school meetings of incoming students and their families.

5. Students read during the summer as a part of a planned program.

6. Families, schools, and youth-serving agencies assist each other in encouraging young people to read.

Current Status

1. Many schools do not provide Web site information that promotes reading.

2. About half the residents of Indiana do not have a public library card.

3. Many students are from families that neither read nor discuss newspapers and their content.

4. Most schools provide an orientation program for students enrolling from feeder schools, but many do not use the opportunity to promote family reading activities.

5. Many students do not participate in any planned program that encourages summer reading.

Actions Needed

Parents

1. Work closely with other parents and schools as members of PTAs.

2. Serve as a reading role model for children.

3. Use the public library with their children.

4. Read newspapers and discuss content with children.

5. Provide books and other printed materials.

Middle Grades Schools

6. Put information on Web sites that promotes reading and links to the public library.

7. Promote reading at parent meetings.

8. Provide access to current, appealing, high-interest, and useful books and other reading materials.

9. Work closely with the public library to seek library cards for students and to provide information about public library activities for young adolescents.

10. Know about and support the activities of youth-serving agencies.

Indiana's young adolescents deserve community-based programs that encourage young people in all aspects of their reading development.

Goals

1. Community organizations provide books for youth-serving organizations and public and school libraries.

2. Non-traditional educators receive encouragement and assistance to provide reading opportunities for the youth they serve.

3. Foundations and businesses provide assistance to encourage young adolescents to read.

4. Partnership programs are established with local donors—including civic groups, foundations, and businesses—so that each community program site has a relevant, appealing book collection.

5. Civic groups, businesses, and donors recognize the need for local reading role models. Non-traditional educators demonstrate increased awareness about the reading needs of young adolescents.

6. Youth-serving agencies build reading materials and staff development opportunities into proposals for funding new programs.

Current Status

1. Schools may not understand the potential of youth-serving agencies to provide assistance for middle grades students to improve their reading skills and habits.

2. Youth-serving agencies and donors may not understand that books and reading can be an appropriate and vital component of all youth programming, not the exclusive domain of the school.

3. Many non-traditional educators, even those with heightened awareness, need help with program tools and ideas.

4. Donors may be interested in initiatives that address high profile needs. They may not understand the more subtle but important role that non-traditional educational programs can play in extending learning beyond the classroom.

Actions Needed

Community Agencies

1. Offer reading tutoring for young adolescents.

2. Provide access to books, magazines, and newspapers.

3. Work closely with schools to share needs and services.

4. Provide resources to youth service agencies to encourage young adolescents to read.

Middle Grades Schools

5. Invite youth service professionals to schools, share needs and services, and offer help with in-service training or loan of materials.

6. Become familiar with local youth service programs, and encourage student participation in their programs.

7. Provide parents with information concerning youth-serving agencies.

In 2008 many individuals active in the Middle Grades Reading Network activities were asked to develop an updated Blueprint in light of things that had happened over the previous 13 years. The result is this 2009 edition.

The Blueprint represents many hours of work by dedicated individuals who care deeply about the state of Indiana and the welfare of its young people. At the heart of all the work lies the belief that what is good for Indiana's young people will be good for the entire state. Addressing the reading needs of Indiana's young adolescents is essential, we believe, for the health and well-being of our state. There are several clear steps described in this Blueprint that we must take in order to achieve our goals.

The eight areas remain the same: access to books, encouragement to value reading, time to read, skilled reading leaders, public library support, community agency support, family support, and reading role models. Each area has goals, the current status, and actions needed if we are to nourish Indiana's middle grades students so that they will be able to develop their reading skills to their full potential.

Since 1995 all of the goals received attention from those who support the reading needs of Indiana's middle grades students.

- Funding for school library books was increased due to state efforts resulting in more reading of school library books by students.

- Middle grades schools promoted reading through various programs and the display of posters in halls and classrooms.

- Many schools added reading classes in addition to language arts classes.

- New reading licenses were approved by the state, thus increasing the supply of highly skilled reading teachers.

- Public library programs were promoted, including summer reading programs and the issuing of public library cards.

- Newspaper in Education programs were provided in most middle grades schools.

- Parents were provided information about school reading programs on Web sites.

- Teachers, school library media specialists, and principals set a good example as reading role models by sharing and discussing books they had read.

- Many schools administered the Middle Grades Reading Assessment and made appropriate changes in their reading programs.

ACCESS TO BOOKS

Indiana's young adolescents deserve access to current, appealing, high-interest, and useful books and other reading materials in their classrooms, homes, public libraries, and school libraries, and other locations within the community.

Goals

1. Schools purchase two school library books per student per year.

2. The majority of the books in school library book collections have copyright dates from the past 10 years.

3. The state provides categorical funds for school library books.

4. School library books may be purchased from the Capitol Projects Fund.

5. School corporations must spend $20 per student per year on their library programs (511 IAC 6.1-5-6) for books and other printed materials.

6. The circulation rate of school library books is 30 or more books per student per year.

7. All middle grades Young Hoosier Book Award books are available to students.

8. Twenty percent or more students read at least five of the Young Hoosier Book Award books and vote for their favorite book.

9. Most students have public library cards.

10. All students participate in Newspaper In Education activities.

11. The school Web site has links to the school library media center and public library.

Current Status

1. After losing state funds in 2002, the circulation of middle grades school library books is now lower than before the state provided matching funds.

2. Schools may purchase computers from the Capitol Projects Fund, but no school library books can be provided, even for new schools.

3. The state no longer provides categorical funds for school library books. When it did, circulation increased dramatically.

4. Under current law, school corporations must spend $8 per student per year on their library programs (511 IAC 6.1-5-6). The amount was determined in 1989 when the average price of a book was $8. The average price is now over $20. The $8 presently includes not only materials but also is permitted to be interpreted to include salaries of library-related staff, so schools do not have to purchase any print materials to satisfy this regulation.

5. Current books, magazines, and newspapers are needed for schools to succeed in meeting Indiana's academic standards.

6. In 2007, only 1.2 percent of middle grades students read five or more of the Young Hoosier Book Award books and voted for their favorite book.

7. Most middle grades students do not have a public library card.

8. Most Indiana newspapers provide Newspaper In Education programs, but all middle grades schools do not participate in them.

Actions Needed

Middle Grades Schools

1. Purchase two school library books per student per year.

2. Feature the Young Hoosier Book Award program by distribution of the books,

Indiana's young adolescents deserve public libraries that provide services specifically designed to engage young people's interest in reading.

Goals

1. All Indiana's young adolescents have access to public libraries.

2. Most students have public library cards.

3. Libraries provide special opportunities and programming for young adolescents, resulting in increased participation by adolescents.

4. School Web sites have links to the public library Web sites.

5. Public libraries and schools work together to promote summer reading.

Current Status

1. There is no public library available to young adolescents in parts of the state.

2. Most students do not have a public library card.

3. Most public libraries have special opportunities and programming for young adolescents.

4. Many young adolescents do not use the public libraries available to them.

5. Many school Web sites do not have links to public library Web sites.

6. Public libraries have summer reading programs available for middle grades students, but many schools do not actively promote summer reading.

Actions Needed

Public Libraries

1. Provide professional development in the area of young adult materials and programming.

2. Encourage schools to provide visits to the public library.

3. Promote programs through Web postings, e-mail notices, brochures, and school visits.

4. Develop partnerships between public libraries and community youth-service organizations for reading opportunities.

5. Provide Web site information for young adolescents.

Middle Grades Schools

6. Work with public libraries to ensure that all students learn about their public library and know how to obtain a public library card.

7. Promote special public library programs by distributing materials, sponsoring field trips to public libraries, and arranging visits by public librarians to schools.

8. Add a link to the local public library on school Web sites.

9. Promote summer reading using the public library.

State

10. Make public libraries available to everyone in the state.

11. Until public libraries are available to everyone in the state, allow middle grades students from areas that do not have a public library to use others in the state at no charge.

Goals *continued . . .*

2. Most Indiana colleges and universities provide programs that lead to an adequate supply of teachers with the Early Adolescent Reading License.

3. All middle grades schools have full-time library media specialists.

4. Reading teachers and library media specialists participate in local, regional, state, and/or national professional development meetings.

Current Status

1. Many Indiana young adolescents do not have teachers with the Early Adolescent Reading License.

2. While most Indiana colleges and universities provide programs that lead to reading licenses, most are producing teachers with the Early Childhood and Middle Childhood reading licenses. Schools have difficulty in finding licensed reading teachers for the middle grades.

3. Some school corporations have eliminated middle grades school librarians or have made them part-time. Per pupil ratio of school librarians to students has deteriorated over the past years so that Indiana is currently ranked 49th of the 50 states in providing professional school librarians.

4. Many schools do not encourage or support state and national professional development meetings available for reading teachers and school librarians.

5. Many schools do not offer professional development opportunities for reading teachers and school library media specialists.

Actions Needed

Middle Grades Schools

1. When openings become available, hire teachers with the Early Adolescent Reading License.

2. Seek placement of student teachers working on the Early Adolescent Reading License with reading teachers.

3. Provide full-time library media specialists.

4. Encourage reading teachers to participate in local, state, and national meetings provided by the International Reading Association.

5. Encourage library media specialists to participate in local, state, and national meetings provided by the Indiana Library Federation and the American Library Association.

6. Provide professional development opportunities for reading teachers and school library media specialists.

State

7. Require that all middle grades schools have at least one full-time school library media specialist.

Colleges and Universities

8. Promote the value of the Early Adolescent Reading License to teacher candidates, and increase the number available to Indiana middle grades schools.

9. Include the science of reading in reading courses to demonstrate a balanced reading curriculum.

10. Promote a balanced reading curriculum in reading courses.

promotion of the program, and recognition of students who read five or more of the books.

3. Circulate at least 30 books per student per year.

4. Work with the public library to provide library cards for all students.

5. Provide Newspaper in Education activities.

6. Feature school and public libraries on the school Web sites.

State

7. Provide categorical funds for school library books.

8. Allow school corporations to purchase school library books from the Capitol Projects Fund.

9. Increase the amount that school corporations must spend on the library programs (511 IAC 6.1-5-6) from $8 to $20 per student per year.

10. Amend 511 IAC 6.1-5-6 to eliminate salaries of library-related staff.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO VALUE READING

Indiana's young adolescents deserve schools that feature an environment where reading is valued, promoted, and encouraged.

Goals

1. The oldest students in schools are avid readers and pass that culture of reading interest on to younger students.

2. The school Web site promotes independent reading, the school library media center, the Young Hoosier Book Award, the local public library, and summer independent reading.

3. School library media specialists, teachers, and public librarians develop programs that encourage parents to read to and read with their young adolescents.

4. School personnel read, discuss, and share information about books with each other, with students, and with families.

5. Posters, display cases, and bulletin boards highlight reading throughout the school.

6. Schools feature the Young Hoosier Book Award by providing copies of the books, by placing charts in classrooms where students record the titles of books they have read, and by recognizing those students who read five or more of the books and vote for their favorite book.

7. In addition to the Young Hoosier Book Award program, schools provide other special programs to promote reading.

8. Newspapers are available both in the school library media center and in classrooms.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO VALUE READING

Current Status

1. Many older middle grades students are not good reading role models.

2. Most middle grades schools' Web sites do not feature reading.

3. Many schools have not provided encouragement for faculty, school librarians, and public librarians to jointly work to help parents to promote reading to their children.

4. Most elementary schools feature reading in their halls with posters and by other means. Most high schools do not. Many middle grades schools are closer to high schools than elementary schools in how they feature reading.

5. Most classrooms do not have Young Hoosier Book Award charts.

6. Many schools do not have special programs to promote reading.

7. Many schools do not provide students with enough opportunities to develop life-long habits of daily reading of newspapers.

Actions Needed

Middle Grades Schools

1. Provide opportunities for older students to serve as reading role models for younger students.

2. Add information about reading to the school Web site, including the school and public libraries and any programs that promote independent reading.

3. Purchase and place posters in halls and other locations such as the READ posters from the American Library Association.

4. Display throughout the school student-made posters that promote reading.

5. Purchase Young Hoosier Book Award charts and place them in reading classrooms.

6. Start a reading incentive program and continue to provide support for materials and recognition of student success.

7. Contact the local newspaper to begin or upgrade the Newspaper In Education program.

State

8. Initiate a statewide summer reading program that encourages reading of books, magazines, and newspapers.

TIME TO READ

Indiana's young adolescents deserve dedicated time during the school day to read for a variety of purposes—pleasure, information, and exploration.

Goals

1. Reading classes are provided for all middle grades students.

2. Teachers have access to standardized reading test results for all students.

TIME TO READ

3. Teachers have reading comprehension and vocabulary materials for use with the wide range of reading levels in their classrooms.

4. Classrooms have independent reading materials such as books, magazines, and newspapers.

5. Special help is provided for struggling readers whose reading proficiency is lower than that needed for academic success.

6. Students have access to professionally staffed school libraries throughout the day.

7. Time to read is set aside during the school day.

8. Indiana colleges and universities provide programs that lead to an adequate supply of teachers with the Young Adolescent Reading License.

Current Status

1. Many students are not enrolled in reading classes.

2. Many schools do not provide standardized reading test results for teachers to use in providing instruction at the reading level of students.

3. While there are more materials than ever for the various reading levels of young adolescents, many teachers are not provided with these materials.

4. Most Title I programs do not include middle grades students. Many struggling readers are not enrolled in programs similar to Title I where highly skilled reading teachers have a variety of materials to use.

Actions Needed

Middle Grades Schools

1. Change schedules to provide reading classes.

2. Hire teachers with the Early Adolescence Reading License when openings occur.

3. Provide standardized reading testing for all students, either school wide or in reading classrooms.

4. Become acquainted with reading materials suitable for all reading levels of young adolescents, and provide appropriate materials for teachers to use with students.

5. Provide special instruction for struggling readers.

6. Schedule time for students to read during the school day.

SKILLED READING LEADERS

Indiana's young adolescents deserve teachers and school librarians who continually seek to renew their skills and enthusiasm in sharing reading with young people through participation in diverse professional development activities.

Goals

1. Reading classes with licensed reading teachers are provided for all middle grades students.