

Literacy

A Position Paper
Of the
Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee
CSEAC -
July 2001

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LITERACY INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION

Position Statement of the CSEAC

Adopted on July 27, 2001

The Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee has taken the following position on the need to promote research-based instructional practices in the area of literacy:

WHEREAS the life-long skills of reading and writing are critical to a student's well-being and success...

WHEREAS 40% of U.S. 9 year-olds score below basic reading levels...
National Assessment of Educational Progress

WHEREAS it is estimated that 17-20% of the nation's population has a reading disability...
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

WHEREAS reading failure begins early, and research has shown that most students who are below grade level in the early grades rarely catch up with their peers...
National Research Council

WHEREAS delaying intervention until 3rd grade has been shown to result in the need for remediation that is both time-consuming and expensive...
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

WHEREAS much of reading failure is preventable through the use of early screening programs and research-based instructional practices...
Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children

WHEREAS intensive training programs that emphasize phonology and language comprehension have been shown to substantially improve literacy skills of students with significant reading disabilities...
Learning First Alliance

It is the opinion of the Colorado State Special Education Advisory Committee that:

- Adequate consideration has not been given in Colorado to the well-established body of scientific research in literacy that addresses the ways in which children learn to read and the methods that provide the best instruction
- Utilization of this knowledge would support the literacy development of all types of students, including those with learning disabilities, developmental delays, and sensory and language disorders
- Research-based methods for literacy instruction should be available to students at Pre-kindergarten, elementary, and secondary levels to ensure adequate literacy rates at graduation.

THEREFORE strong consideration should be given to improving existing instructional practices in Colorado schools that would support the needs of all types of students, including those with disabilities, in the following areas:

Instructional Practices based on Scientific Research:

- Provide beginning readers with explicit instruction in the sound structure of language
- Emphasize fluency and automaticity in decoding and sight word reading
- Include instruction in vocabulary and comprehension beginning in the earliest grades.
- Provide effective teaching practices based on individual needs

Focus on Prevention:

- Place an emphasis at state and local levels on pre-kindergarten/kindergarten programming
- Include screening to identify students who are at-risk for failure in reading and writing
- Provide pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs that emphasize oral and written language activities

Training:

- Upgrade pre-service teacher training programs by including scientific study of language and literacy
- Promote on-going training in effective, research-based literacy programming for in-service general and special education teachers
- Provide in-service training to paraprofessionals to ensure consistency in reading and writing instruction

Funding:

- Increase funding for literacy instruction in Pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.
- Provide funding for reduced class size and smaller caseloads for general and special education programs
- Provide adequate materials for instruction in literacy, increasing accessibility to reading and writing materials appropriate for varying ability levels within each classroom

Accountability:

- Require schools to have high literacy expectations for all students, including those with disabilities
- Include goals for students with disabilities in school improvement plans
- Require evaluation and progress monitoring of Colorado Student Assessment Program and other assessment data on all students at state and local levels, including students with disabilities

Parent Involvement:

- Encourage parents to become involved in school and home literacy programs
- Promote special education parent participation on literacy and accountability committees

Be it resolved that the CSEAC recommends the following actions:

1. Reprogram pre-service teacher training with an emphasis on creating a deep understanding of the nature of language and literacy research. Provide intensive, on-going in-service programs to all in-service teachers and paraprofessionals to assure adequate instruction consisting of scientifically researched programs that provide instructional guidelines, language instruction and comprehension techniques.
2. Change the emphasis at the state and local levels from the current focus on 3rd grade literacy to include an emphasis on pre-kindergarten through first grade levels. Include screening at these levels to identify students at-risk for reading failure.
3. Provide smaller caseloads and class sizes for special and general education teachers to allow time for appropriate, effective, individual and small group reading instruction and remediation.
4. Increase funding for smaller class sizes, extensive teacher training, coaching, tutoring and Para educator support for literacy.
5. Assure that schools have high literacy expectations for all students, at all ages and grade levels, including those with disabilities.
6. Encourage the involvement of parents in their children's reading. Include local supports to encourage parent-professional partnerships and collaboration. Encourage special education parent participation on school and district literacy and accountability committees.
7. Support the Colorado Basic Literacy Act with an emphasis on instructional intensity, Individual Educational Plan (IEP) progress monitoring, accountability/tracking of students on Individualized Literacy Plans, with on-going linguistic supports for students at all ages and grade levels.

Introduction

The purpose of this position paper by the Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee is to encourage the use of scientific research on literacy to guide policy decisions that affect the literacy education of all children in the State of Colorado. We believe that effective and appropriate literacy instruction is the right of ALL children, including those with learning difficulties.

In recent years, policy-makers and educators have not given adequate consideration to the well-established body of scientific research that addresses the ways children learn to read and write and the methods that provide the most effective instruction. The utilization of this knowledge base would support the literacy development of all types of students, including those with learning disabilities, developmental delays, and sensory and language disorders. For our purposes, we are defining literacy as the ability to read and write at grade level, or an appropriate developmental level.

The use of popular approaches that are not substantiated by scientific evidence needs to be replaced by “best practice” instructional approaches that are based on rigorous scientific research. These approaches focus on systematic instruction, early intervention and the prevention of reading problems. In addition, the use of “one approach for all” should be replaced by a combination of effective teaching practices that are based on individual needs.

It is our hope that this information will be disseminated to the State Board of Education and Legislature, teachers and administrators, parents, the general public, and to all special education/disability stakeholders.

The Importance of Literacy for all Children

Learning to read is critical to a child's well being and future success. "Reading skill serves as the major foundational skill for all school-based learning, and without it, the chances for academic and occupational success are limited" (Lyon, 1998a, p. 13). Reading failure begins early, takes root quickly, and affects students for the rest of their lives (Moats, 2001).

The issue of literacy is of national concern. Despite the best efforts of teachers and parents, some children have not learned to read. The number of children who are poor readers has been debated, but a widely accepted indicator provided in a 1996 report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is that 40% of all U.S. nine-year-olds score below the basic reading level (Snow, et al., 1998). Longitudinal studies from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) indicate that at least 17-20% of the nation's population has a reading disability (Lyon, 1996). Thus, at least ten million children, or 1 in 5, experience difficulties learning to read.

The report of the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, entitled Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, et al., 1998) identifies several factors that contribute to success or failure in reading. These include physical factors (early language impairments, hearing impairments, cognitive delays, attention deficits) and readiness factors (less prior knowledge and skill in the ability to attend to the sounds of language as distinct from meaning, or the lack familiarity with letter names and the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading). Children whose parents had difficulty learning to read, children from poor neighborhoods, and those with limited English are also at risk for reading failure.

Prevention of Reading Failure

One of the most important findings from recent reading research is that children who get off to a poor start in reading rarely catch up (Torgesen, 1998). According to the National Research Council, 74% of those with reading difficulties in third grade will never read at grade level without proper interventions. Additionally, delaying interventions until third grade requires two hours a day of intensive, expert instruction. This approach is expensive and time consuming.

It is our opinion that strong consideration should be given to improving existing instructional practices before intensive interventions are required. In its summary of instructional strategies, the National Research Council stated that “a large number of students who should be capable of reading ably given adequate instruction are not doing so, suggesting that the instruction available to them is not appropriate” (p. 25) and that

the nature and quality of classroom literacy instruction is a pivotal force in preventing reading difficulties in young children. Adequate initial reading instruction requires a focus on using reading to obtain meaning from print, understanding the sublexical structure of spoken words; exposing the nature of the orthographic system; practice in the specifics of frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships; and frequent and intensive opportunities to read. (p. 223)

Prekindergarten and kindergarten students need to have high quality programs that provide oral language activities, direct instruction in phonemic awareness through a multisensory approach, reading aloud, exploration in the concepts of print, thematic activities, print/word-

directed activities, writing experiences, sight words and phonemic analysis. First grade instruction should provide explicit instruction and practice with sound structures that lead to familiarity with spelling-sound conventions and their use in identifying printed words, practice with sight words, and many opportunities for instructional and/or independent reading.

In proficient reading, word recognition is primarily automatic, unconscious and rapid. If too much time and effort are focused on decoding, meaning is lost (Honig, 1997). By the end of third grade, students should be fluent and automatic with word recognition and lower level reading skills so that they can concentrate on reading for concept understanding. This is the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn”. Including comprehension instruction from the earliest grades helps to build linguistic and conceptual knowledge (Snow, et al., 1998). Vocabulary and comprehension strategies, such as summarizing, identifying the main idea, predicting, drawing inferences and monitoring for misunderstandings, also need to be a part of early literacy programming.

Intervention

According to Louisa Moats (2001), “improvements in reading education in the lower elementary grades are coming too slowly to affect the huge numbers of students beyond third grade who have been the victims of misguided reading instruction” (p. 1). These students need to receive individual or small group instruction that is coordinated with high quality classroom instruction. Intensive training programs, particularly those emphasizing phonology in combination with instruction in reading skills (see Appendix A), have been shown to substantially improve the word reading skills of students with serious reading disabilities (Snow et al., 1998). Children at all grade levels, especially those from homes that are not language rich,

or who have learning disabilities, need systematic instruction in word attack strategies, vocabulary, language comprehension and background knowledge (Learning First Alliance, 1998).

Early screening in kindergarten and first grade can help educators to identify children who may have difficulties with beginning reading. Teachers should be using research-based guidelines regarding risk factors and prerequisite skills to identify students who are at risk for failure. There are many early screening tools currently available that were developed with these guidelines in mind (see Appendix B). Early detection, followed by appropriate interventions is central to preventing reading difficulties.

Summary

Teaching all children to read, the key to subsequent educational success, should be the most important priority of our educational system. It is well documented, however, that reading failure is at critical levels. Much of this failure could be prevented if schools would apply what is known about beginning reading instruction and effective intervention strategies (Honig, 1997). Nearly four decades of scientific research on how children learn to read supports an emphasis on phoneme awareness and phonics in an environment that is rich in literature, oral language and comprehension activities (Lyon, 1998b). Early detection and intervention policies are another essential component in the prevention of reading difficulties. It is the opinion of this committee that although some districts, schools, and teachers are making a concerted effort to implement research-based instruction, the Colorado educational system as a whole is not making sufficient effort to provide effective instructional strategies.

Recommendations

CSEAC recommends that the following changes be made in order to significantly impact the reading and writing abilities of our students:

1. Reprogram pre-service teacher training at the university/college level for Pre-kindergarten, elementary, and secondary teachers, reading teachers, and special education teachers with an emphasis on creating a deep understanding of the nature of language that is firmly based on linguistic research about phonological, syntactic, and semantic systems, the alphabetic principle and the processes of producing and understanding spoken and written language to ensure literacy for all.
2. Intensive, on-going in-service programs must be required of all Pre-kindergarten, elementary, secondary, adult education, reading and special education teachers to assure adequate instruction consisting of scientifically researched programs that provide multisensory (direct, systematic, sequential and explicit) instructional guidelines, language instruction and comprehension techniques.
3. Promote the training of entire school staffs so that there is consistency in reading and writing instruction throughout the school, or district. Promote research-based training opportunities so that paraprofessionals are well prepared to support reading and writing programs in a consistent manner.
4. Change the emphasis at the state and local levels from the current focus on 3rd grade literacy to include an emphasis on pre-kindergarten through first grade levels. Include screening at these levels to identify students at-risk for reading failure. Procedures for early identification should include a national standardized screening instrument to

- introduce accountability for early grades. New students enrolling in Colorado schools should also be screened for reading disabilities and related disorders.
5. Provide smaller caseloads and class sizes for special and general education teachers to allow time for appropriate, effective, individual and small group reading and writing instruction and intervention. Provide on-going linguistic supports for students at all ages and grade levels.
 6. Increase funding for smaller class sizes, extensive teacher training, coaching, tutoring and Para educator support for literacy.
 7. Assure that schools have high literacy expectations for all students, including those with disabilities. Schools should include literary goals to address the needs of all students, including those with disabilities. Emphasis should be on progress monitoring, individual school improvement plans, and district accountability goals that include ALL students. Accountability for the results of the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) should also consist of evaluation and monitoring at state and local levels of categorical populations, in order to ensure increased proficiency for all students.
 8. Provide effective and appropriate materials, tools, and strategies for reading and writing instruction of students at all grade levels. Students should have access to appropriate literacy materials, based on ability level, including age-appropriate decodable reading materials within classrooms, on computers, and in school libraries.
 9. Encourage the involvement of parents in their children's reading and writing. Include local supports to encourage parent-professional partnerships and collaboration. Encourage special education parent participation on school and district literacy and accountability committees.

10. Base decisions on guidelines established by the National Reading Panel regarding what high quality, scientific research is in the field of reading.
11. Provide information for secondary level language arts and content area teachers on interventions for secondary students with reading and writing deficits.

Appendix A

Multisensory reading programs:

Alphabetic Phonics, Cambridge, MA: Educational Publishing Service.

Gillingham, A. & Stillman, B. W. (1997). The Gillingham manual: Remedial training for children with specific disability in reading, spelling and penmanship (8th ed.).

Greene, J. F. (2000). Language! A reading, writing and spelling curriculum for at-risk and ESL students. Longmont, CO: Sopris-West.

Herman, R. D. (1993). The Herman Method for reversing reading failure. Sherman Oaks, CA: The Herman Method Institute.

Knight, J. R. (1986). Starting over: A combined teaching manual and student textbook for reading, writing, spelling, vocabulary and handwriting. Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service.

Lindamood, P. & Lindamood, P. (1998). Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing Program. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Project READ. Bloomington, MN: The Language Circle.

Slingerland, B. H. & Aho, M. (1994-1996). A multisensory approach to language arts for specific language disability children. Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service.

Spaulding, R. B. with Spaulding, W. T. (1990). The writing road to reading: The Spaulding method of phonics for teaching speech, writing and reading. NY: Quill.

Wilson Reading Language System, Millbury, MA: Wilson Language Training Corporation.

Appendix B

Early screening tools:

Get ready to read, (1999). National Center for Learning Disabilities.

Lindamood, C. H. & Lindamood, P. C. (1979). The LAC: Lindamood Auditory

Conceptualization Test. Chicago:Riverside.

Torgesen, J. K. & Bryant, B. (1994) Test of Phonological Awareness. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Wagner, R., Torgesen, J. K. & Rashotte, C. (1997). Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Yopp, H. K. (1995) A test assessing phonemic awareness in young children. The Reading Teacher, 49, 20-29.

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Honig, B. (1997). Reading the right way. In Consortium on reading excellence: reading research anthology. (pp. 13-23). Novato, CA: Arena Press.

Lyon, G. R. (1996, October 27). Why Johnny can't decode. The Washington Post.

Lyon, G. R. (1998a). Overview of reading and literacy initiatives. In Consortium on reading excellence: reading research anthology. (pp. 7-12). Novato, CA: Arena Press.

Lyon, G. R. (1998b). Why reading is not a natural process. Educational Leadership, March 1998, 14-18.

Learning First Alliance. (1998). Every child reading: an action plan of the Learning First Alliance. Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers.

Moats, L. C. (2001). When older kids can't read. Educational Leadership, March, 2001.

Snow, C. E. (1998). Preventing reading difficulties in young children. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Torgesen, J. K. (1998). Catch them before they fall. American Educator, Spring/Summer, 1998, 32-39.