

# Teaching Children to Read:

## What Every School Board Member and Administrator Should Know

Why should school boards and administrators be very concerned about the reading ability of the children in their districts?

How can Early Intervening Services (EIS) and Response to Intervention (RtI) provide an answer to Pennsylvania's literacy problem (<http://www.pattan.k12.pa.us/files/RtI/RtI-WhatItL.pdf>)?

Consider these realities:

- Reading is an acquired skill, unlike spoken language. If learning to read were as natural as acquiring spoken language, many more societies would have written languages. (*Teaching Reading Is Rocket Science*, Louisa Moats, Ed.D. <http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/rocketsci.pdf>).
- Approximately 50% of children in special education are identified as learning disabled. Of all children identified as learning disabled, 80% are primarily impaired in reading; 90% of these reading impaired children have problems with the development of decoding skills. "A Scientific Approach to Reading Instruction" (<http://www.lonline.org/article/6251>).
- "Research proves that if you know what to look for, you can spot kids who are going to need help learning to read by the beginning of kindergarten, The longer you wait, the poorer the odds are you can reach them." ("The Phonics Revival" <http://www.rinr.fsu.edu/summer2002/phonics.html>)
- Children who are poor readers at the end of first grade almost never acquire average-level reading skills by the end of elementary school (Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz, and Fletcher, 1996; Juel, 1988; Shaywitz et al., 1999; Torgesen and Burgess, 1998). "Waiting Rarely Works: 'Late Bloomers' Usually Just Wilt" (2004) [http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american\\_educator/issues/fall04/latebloomers.htm](http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/issues/fall04/latebloomers.htm))
- Second grade is broadly viewed as the children's last chance. Those who are not on track by third grade have little chance of ever catching up. (*Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* <http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?isbn=030906418X&page=212>)
- NICHD studies show that 74% of children who are poor readers in 3rd grade remain poor readers 9th grade. ("A Scientific Approach to Reading Instruction": <http://www.lonline.org/article/6251>)
- Of the 10 to 15% of children who will eventually drop out of school, more than 75% will report difficulties learning to read. ("What Principals Need to Know About Reading" <http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=1071>)
- Catherine Snow, in her book [Unfulfilled Expectations](#) (1991), found that, after two years of instruction with a strong, knowledgeable reading teacher, there was no measurable difference in academic achievement between children who came from low-support homes and children who came from high-support homes. In her study, 100% of the children in both categories experienced high levels of academic success.
- By routinely applying the lessons learned from the scientific findings to the classroom, most reading failure could be avoided. It is estimated that the current failure rate of 20-30 percent could be reduced to the range of 2 to 10 percent." ("What Education Schools Aren't Teaching about Reading and What Elementary Teachers Aren't Learning" <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/12625>)

## Bottom line:

- If approximately 50% of children in special education are identified as learning disabled, and
- If 80% of those children have been identified as “reading disabled”, and
- If 90% of children with reading disabilities primarily have impaired decoding skills, and
- If reading failure rates as high as 20 to 30 percent can be reduced to 2 – 10 percent and if a research-based “roadmap” exists to achieve reading proficiency for all but those 2 – 10 percent, then...

It is reasonable to conclude that the total number of students requiring special education, as well as the cost to educate them, could be dramatically reduced. It is also reasonable to expect that school districts should be capable of preparing teachers to teach reading based upon research evidence.

“Special education costs are inevitably connected to a school system’s failure to teach struggling readers effectively. These children who arrive at school unprepared to learn, make up a significant part of any urban systems enrollment. Nearly all of them can learn to read when given teachers who have been trained to reach readers who do not catch on automatically. Yet many of these struggling children end up labeled “learning disabled” even when there is nothing clinically wrong with them..... Many of the so-called learning disabled children who flee public school for private education are victims of disastrous reading instruction.... Nearly all of these children could be reached through methods like those that have been used for decades at specialized schools or that have recently been touted in the research literature.” Staples, B. (6/19/06) “How Schools Pay a (Very High) Price for Failing to Teach Reading Properly”, New York Times (<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F20E13FF35550C7A8DDDAF0894DE404482>)

“No other skill taught in school and learned by school children is more important than reading. It is the gateway to all other knowledge. If children do not learn to read efficiently, the path is blocked to every subject they encounter in their school years.” (Excerpt from *Reading: The First Chapter in Education* found at <http://www.margaretkay.com/Matthew%20Effect.htm>)

“In short, the failure of a substantial number of students to learn to read during the critical first three years of school can expect to live on the margins of society in every way. Universal literacy is the ultimate ‘access’ issue in American education.” (Excerpt from *Reading: The First Chapter in Education* found at <http://www.margaretkay.com/Matthew%20Effect.htm>)

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, “Pennsylvania has one of the highest achievement gaps in the country” (<http://www.pde.state.pa.us/newsroom/cwp/view.asp?a=256&q=99011>)

We are asking the board to consider funding “Early Intervening Services.”

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, (IDEA 2004), **EIS** Early Intervening Services (EIS) are a set of coordinated services for students in kindergarten through grade 12 (with a particular emphasis on students in kindergarten through grade three) who are **not** currently identified as needing special education or related services, but who need additional academic and behavioral support to succeed in a general education environment. EIS provide the use of up to 15 percent of Part B funds to develop and implement early intervening services. (“Early Intervening Services (EIS) and Response to Intervention” (RtI) <http://www.pattan.k12.pa.us/files/RTI/EIS-RtI-Ftsh.pdf>)

“An RTI (Response to Intervention) model with a three-tier continuum of school-wide support might include the following tiers and levels of support: (1) Tier one (Primary Intervention), for all students using high quality scientific research-based instruction in their general education setting. It would not be appropriate to use EIS funds for these activities since these students do not need additional academic and behavioral support to succeed in a general education environment. **(2) Tier Two (and Tier Three in Pennsylvania) for specialized small group instruction of students determined to be at risk for academic and behavioral problems. It would be appropriate to use EIS funds to support these activities.** (3) Tier three (Tertiary Intervention) for specialized individualized instructional/behavioral support for students with intensive needs. EIS funds could not be used if these students were currently receiving special education or related services.” (In Pennsylvania, students receiving Tier Three supports do not receive special education services.)

(Question F5 - <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CQaCorner%2C8%2C>)

EIS funds may be used for:

Professional development (which may be provided by entities other than LEAs) for teachers and other school staff to enable such personnel to deliver scientifically based academic and behavioral interventions, including scientifically based literacy instruction, and, where appropriate, instruction on the use of adaptive and instructional software.

<http://www.pattan.k12.pa.us/files/RTI/EIS-Rti-Ftsht.pdf>

While districts are not required to implement Early Intervening Services, school boards and administrators should give serious consideration to authorizing 15% of the district IDEA funds for these services.

Our children are counting on you!