

# Reading Association Presents Children's Literacy Rights

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Washington

Effective reading instruction and a rich array of reading materials are not only requirements for success in life, they are also the right of every child, the nation's largest reading organization said last week. The group made the declaration in a strongly worded statement aimed at policymakers and school administrators.

"Literacy is a basic human right," Carol M. Santa, the president of the International Reading Association, said at a press conference here. "We must honor children's rights to an excellent reading background."

In a policy statement drafted as the 90,000-member organization of reading teachers and researchers works to strengthen its

mission—and as more states prescribe methods of instruction—IRA officials implore decisionmakers to take a more comprehensive approach to formulating solid literacy programs.

Reacting to national test results indicating that a quarter of the nation's 4th graders cannot read proficiently, more than a dozen states have earmarked money to bolster the teaching of basic skills.

## Policies Too Narrow?

The IRA has warned policymakers that such an approach to the reading problem is shortsighted.

"We agree that phonics and phonemic awareness are critical," said Alan E. Farstrup, the executive director of the Dover, Del.-based group. "But other

things are critical as well."

Recent reform efforts, Ms. Santa said, have led too many schools and districts to rely on one reading program or one method of instruction to teach all children to read.

"You don't teach children to read by putting them through a program. . . . Solutions cannot be based on one part of the reading equation," she said. "Policymakers and educators must adopt a set of broad principles."

The 44-year-old association outlines such principles in its most emphatic policy statement to date. It states that children have a right to:

- Appropriate early reading instruction based on their individual needs;
- Reading instruction that builds both skills and the desire to read

increasingly complex materials;

- Well-prepared teachers who keep their skills up to date through effective professional development;

- A wide variety of books and other reading material in classroom, school, and public libraries;

- Reading assessment that identifies their strengths as well as their needs;

- Supplemental instruction, when needed, from reading specialists;

- Reading instruction that involves parents and communities;

- Reading instruction that considers their first language;

- Equal access to technology used for the improvement of reading instruction; and

- Classrooms that are physically safe and sound and have appropriate student-teacher ra-

tios, certified teachers, and student discipline.

## Getting Attention

At least one reading expert praised the guidelines, saying that with the weight of the IRA behind them, they should get the attention of key policymakers.

"This is a very powerful and compelling statement," said G. Reid Lyon, the director of research for the National Institute for Child Health and Development, part of the National Institutes of Health. "They've done a very good job of trying to protect the rights of children, and they've done it in a thoughtful and research-based manner."

**FOLLOW-UP:** The policy statement is available online at [www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org).