

THE
TIME
IS



LITERATE NATION

SEEDS

Re: Literacy — Some Quotations

“**L**iteracy is not a luxury, it is a right and a responsibility. If our world is to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, we must harness the energy and creativity of all our citizens!”

— *Bill Clinton*

“**W**e must shift the societal norms for equality in literacy and education and we must begin now with our community of SEEDS students:

Struggling readers and learners from all social groups,

Economically disadvantaged youngsters,

English language learners, and students with

Dyslexia, and

Specific Learning Disabilities.”

— *The Literate Nation Board of Directors*



WORKING AT GROUND ZERO FOR SEEDS STUDENTS

Literate Nation: Leading for Literacy



A coalition of educators, parents, citizens, researchers, and cognitive scientists recently formed a movement and founded a nonprofit organization called Literate Nation. Why? We are determined to forge, empower, and mobilize broad alliances of stakeholders to drive the systemic and comprehensive change needed to dramatically improve literacy learning conditions and outcomes for underserved students.

These students include diverse at-risk populations, such as Struggling readers from all backgrounds, Economically disadvantaged youngsters, English language learners, and students with Dyslexia or other Specific learning disabilities. The acronym, SEEDS, encompasses this community of children, who, despite various risk factors, can learn to read proficiently, especially when given reading instruction validated by science and based on data outcomes. Sadly, of the fourth graders who took the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test, 67 percent of all students and 85 percent of low income students who attend high poverty schools failed to reach the “proficient” level.

On behalf of these SEEDS children and our nation, Literate Nation spearheads initiatives to achieve the following objectives:

- ☛ Propel state of the art literacy policy targeted to the unique needs of each state
- ☛ Advance and support (a) teachers’ deep professional knowledge in language, reading

development, and literacy, and (b) teachers' skill in delivering science-validated/data based instruction to address diverse student populations' needs

- ☛ Build the capacity of school leaders to implement, support, and sustain these instructional practices
- ☛ Ignite, fuel, and unite a grassroots movement to drive and sustain all the above
- ☛ Curate and develop content and resources to inspire, inform, and support stakeholders and alliance partners working on all the above
- ☛ Leverage emerging technologies to maximize all these efforts and to strengthen lifelong literacy skills for tomorrow's demands.

These objectives are “levers for change” and dovetail to build a strong foundation from which to execute ongoing and future efforts addressing emerging 21st century literacy demands. Addressing these demands is paramount for students to achieve success in school, in the workplace, and in a global society evolving more rapidly than at any other time in human history.

Nothing less is required for U.S. education to reclaim its former lead in student achievement. Nothing less is necessary if our nation is to develop the human capital needed to innovate, to grow our gross domestic product, and to compete successfully in a global economy. Nothing less is acceptable for our nation's next generation.

Learning to Read: Ground Zero for SEEDS Students

The struggle to learn to read is “ground zero” for children at risk for education failure, especially in grades K3. Ground zero is a critical juncture for SEEDS youngsters, where lifelong harm can occur. The reading instruction they receive as they begin school is pivotal to how they fare at this



tender age, which in turn often predicts achievement levels throughout their school years as well as lifetime outcomes.

The realities of illiteracy are harsh and well known. Failing to read at grade level typically wreaks havoc on the trajectory of young lives, exacerbating other risk factors and causing or compounding countless societal consequences, such as delinquency, incarceration, and economic dependency. The equation is simple: Literacy is key to a promising future for our nation's young citizens and for our nation; illiteracy threatens the wellbeing of both.

U.S. literacy levels and trends remain worrisome, especially for at-risk populations, but illiteracy is not an unsolvable problem. Solutions are at hand, but they are not easy. They require concerted, systemic, collective, and ongoing efforts grounded in a clear understanding of illiteracy's complex causes and with an eye toward emerging literacy demands of the mid 21st century.

Indeed, functional literacy—the reading-writing-language skills needed to manage tasks of daily living and employment—is a moving target tied to evolving environmental demand. Ground-zero casualties, children who do not learn to read in early grades, typically become marginalized adults, unable to cope with tomorrow's accelerating literacy requirements.

How can we convert risk for reading failure and underachievement to success? Addressing this question, particularly at ground zero, is a primary focus for Literate Nation. Why? Ground zero—where serious lifelong damage can occur—also is where important opportunities lie for preventing and mitigating harm.

SEEDS: A Sound Investment

Another focus is to widen the scope beyond any one constituent group under the SEEDS umbrella and to address the fundamental needs shared by all these capable but at-risk children. This inclusive approach is central to a campaign to inoculate large populations against illiteracy's dev-

astating effects. A cornerstone in this effort is to ensure that every K-3rd grade teacher is a reading expert with the deep professional knowledge, the teaching skill, and the ongoing support needed to engage all young learners and help them to achieve grade level reading proficiency.

The constituent groups under the SEEDS umbrella have unique needs. Nevertheless, their varied sources of risk all demand scientifically sound reading development instruction, which is especially effective as these children start school, before they are allowed to fail. In fact, preventing illiteracy is a “blue chip investment,” whether viewed from the standpoint of sophisticated imaging studies of the brain or from the standpoint of the commonsense adage: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Cultivating the potential of SEEDS children is a sound investment, one that yields fruitful lives and productive citizens whose prognosis for health and happiness is hopeful. These children can learn to read to build content knowledge, to write coherently, and to read deeply to analyze, synthesize, critique, and inform thinking and decisions.

Bottom line: All children deserve sound reading instruction as they start school. SEEDS children, however, require it. To meet the needs of all these children, every K-3rd grade teacher must have the necessary reading-instruction knowledge, skills, and support.

Challenges and Lessons: Springboards for Solutions

Various challenges have hindered literacy campaigns of the past—chief among them, longstanding ideological debate about how to best teach early reading. This, coupled with the complexities of “change dynamics” on a large scale, contributed to a chasm between the substantial body of knowledge about the science of reading development and its instruction and educators’ ability to implement, support, and sustain such practices in schools across the country.



Nevertheless, many reading initiatives and programs have proven highly effective, providing “proof of concept” and offering powerful models for similar campaigns. Even efforts that have fallen short offer important lessons. The challenge now is to consolidate insights from these efforts, to broaden their scope, and to bridge the chasm between (a) knowledge about effective instruction and (b) its implementation in every classroom in our nation.

Literate Nation: A Call to Action

A new generation of education reformers and literacy advocates is working to meet these challenges—collaborating to help launch and support sustainable statewide literacy initiatives across the nation to improve teaching-learning outcomes at ground zero, particularly for SEEDS children. More specifically, these efforts focus on advancing teacher professional knowledge, skill, and support and on promoting the school leadership needed to guide implementation of effective reading instruction. We also seek to apply lessons of past literacy campaigns, to move beyond debate in the reading field, and to redouble efforts to span the knowledge-implementation gap in order to ensure grade-level reading proficiency for all children.

We are determined to make a difference, one that is measurable and sustainable. We welcome involvement from all those who share our goals and mission, and invite you to join the movement for literacy!

Visit our website—www.LiterateNation.org—to learn more about ways you can partner with Literate Nation.



Re: Literacy — Some Quotations

“**T**here are risks and costs to a program of action. But they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.”

— *John F. Kennedy*

“**L**iteracy is a bridge from misery to hope.”

— *Kofi Annan*; former UN Secretary General

“**I**f we talk about literacy, we have to talk about how to enhance our children’s mastery over tools needed to live intelligent, creative, and informed lives.”

— *Danny Glover*; Actor and Social Activist





Endnotes:

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