

**Policy Forum**

**Whole Class Strategies for Reading Instruction  
and Students with Disabilities**

**Convened  
February 27 & 28, 2002**

**Proceedings Document**

**Prepared by:**

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Project FORUM at National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) is a cooperative agreement funded by the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education. The project carries out a variety of activities that provide information needed for program improvement, and promotes the utilization of research data and other information for improving outcomes for students with disabilities. The project also provides technical assistance and information on emerging issues, and convenes small work groups to gather expert input, obtain feedback and develop conceptual frameworks related to critical topics in special education.

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## **Whole Class Strategies for Reading Instruction and Students with Disabilities: A Policy Forum Meeting Proceedings**

### **Background and Purpose of Meeting**

Project FORUM at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), through its cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), facilitates communication among a broad range of stakeholders on critical issues and obtains input on topics related to improved outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. One method Project FORUM uses to facilitate communication and obtain input is convening policy forums or meetings on designated topics agreed upon with OSEP.

The policy forum entitled *Whole Class Strategies for Reading Instruction and Students with Disabilities* was convened in conjunction with the third in a series of three Reading Rockets Satellite Teleconferences produced by WETA, a Washington, DC based public television station, in association with NASDSE. This teleconference focused on whole class strategies for reading instruction and featured three panelists: John T. Guthrie, Professor of Human Development at the University of Maryland; Phyllis C. Hunter, an independent consultant who served on President Bush's Educational Transition Team; and Peggy McCardle, Associate Chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development at the National Institutes of Health. For information about WETA's Reading Rockets program and this Reading Rockets teleconference, go to the following Web addresses: [www.readingrockets.org](http://www.readingrockets.org), [www.readingrockets.org/teleconference3.php](http://www.readingrockets.org/teleconference3.php).

The goals of the policy forum were to:

- Identify the challenges of using whole class strategies for reading instruction with students with disabilities.
- Discuss what facilitates the use of these strategies with students with disabilities.
- Make recommendations to OSEP and other entities on how to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in reading initiatives at the federal, state and local levels.

### **Preparation for the Policy Forum**

Project FORUM worked closely with OSEP to select participants whose knowledge of, and experience with, reading instruction would contribute to accomplishing the policy forum goals. In addition, effort was made to select persons with national, state and local perspectives. Invited participants included state- and district-level specialists in the area of reading, reading teachers, speech/language pathologists, representatives from organizations concerned about reading, researchers, and a Regional Resource Center representative. The participant list can be found in Appendix A. The agenda for the policy forum was developed in collaboration with OSEP to accomplish the goals of the meeting.

## Process of the Policy Forum

The policy forum began with an introductory meeting at 10:00 a.m. on February 27, 2002 at the WETA headquarters in Shirlington, VA. Joy Markowitz, Director of Project FORUM, provided background information about Project FORUM and reviewed the goals of this policy forum. Nancy Reder, Deputy Executive Director of NASDSE, brought greetings from NASDSE, followed by participant introductions. Susan Petroff and Erica Robinson from WETA then gave an overview of the Reading Rockets initiative, reviewed satellite broadcast procedures and provided guidelines for participant-generated questions for the broadcast. After lunch, participants walked to the WETA production studio for the teleconference broadcast from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. The three panelists and participants gathered with FORUM, OSEP and WETA staff after the broadcast to discuss issues raised during the broadcast and other topics related to the teaching of reading.

The policy forum continued on Thursday morning, February 28 at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Alexandria, VA. Following a review of the day's agenda, the participants worked together throughout the day to answer the following questions:

- What are the challenges of using whole class reading strategies with students with disabilities?
- How can educators and policymakers facilitate the use of such strategies?
- What can policymakers at the federal, state and local levels do to support effective reading instruction for students with disabilities and the inclusion of students with disabilities in national reading initiatives?

The policy forum adjourned at 4:00 on Thursday, February 28. The agenda can be found in Appendix B.

## Summary of Discussion Immediately Following the Broadcast

*The following statements reflect comments made or issues raised by one or more of the policy forum participants (see Appendix A) and should not be considered to be consensus statements.*

- There are a variety of national initiatives designed to increase early exposure to books particularly directed at children who live in low-income situations and/or with non-English speaking family members. Examples discussed include: Early Reading First, Reading is Fundamental, Ready to Learn, Reach Out and Read (ROR), as well as efforts within Head Start and the Public Library Association. Some initiatives involve pediatricians; others focus on parents who have low literacy skills.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on these initiatives, see: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/earlyreading>, <http://www.rif.org/>, <http://pbskids.org/readytolearn/>, <http://www.reachoutandread.org/>.

- There is the need to align reading approaches/programs (e.g., Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction [CORI]) with state standards, but no one is doing this yet.
- It may be necessary to complement whole class reading instruction with focused, small group phonemic awareness and phonics instruction for particular students.
- Speech/language pathologists play an important role in the literacy arena. Their role ranges from supporting language development and building emergent literacy skills beginning in infancy to the identification, assessment and treatment of infants, toddlers, young children and adolescents in the areas of speech, language, reading and writing. These professionals may also provide other support services, such as consultation to teachers, families and others to increase understanding of normal development and disorders of language and literacy and the language-literacy relationship. They may also complete diagnostic assessments and plan intervention activities for individuals or small groups in collaboration with teachers and families.
- Providing on-going high quality professional development and support for teachers is a challenge. Teachers cannot teach by reading from a script; skill acquisition is necessary. Peer coaching and paid summer workshops are examples of effective formats for professional development. The importance of professional development for administrators was also discussed.
- Comparing state assessments and standards to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) has not been done, but there are efforts underway to examine assessments and standards among states, including work done by the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (NCIEA), *Quality Counts*, and *Uncommon Measures*.<sup>2</sup>
- In places where full inclusion of students with disabilities has become the norm, the concept of access to the general education curriculum has taken on new significance with the testing requirements in the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA), referred to as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). NCLB was signed into law on January 8, 2002.<sup>3</sup>
- With more attention on accountability measures and increased assessment in grades three through eight, curricula are being viewed in a different way. There are questions about how assessment data will drive decisions related to instructional approaches and curricula. There is also concern about designing meaningful measurement that is not prohibitively expensive and does not lower curriculum standards and consequently student achievement.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nciea.org/>, <http://www.edweek.org/sreports/qc02/>, <http://www.nap.edu/html/uncommon/uncommon.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Under NCLB, tests are aligned with academic standards. Beginning in the 2002-03 school year, schools must administer tests in each of three grade spans: grades 3-5, grades 6-9, and grades 10-12 in all schools. Beginning in the 2005-06 school year, tests must be administered every year in grades 3 through 8 in math and reading. Beginning in the 2007-08 school year, science achievement must also be tested.

## **Challenges of Whole Class Reading Strategies for Students with Disabilities**

*Participants met in small groups to discuss the challenges of using whole class reading strategies for students with disabilities. When all participants reconvened, a representative from each small group reported on the challenges that were discussed in the small groups. The reported challenges were categorized and are summarized below.*

### Instructional

- Development of criterion-based reading assessments that drive instruction, are user-friendly (e.g., short, fast) and use benchmarks;
- Collection of quality data for informing instruction and improving progress for all student groups;
- Implementation of differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students within the whole class setting, including providing materials on a variety of levels, keeping all learners engaged, allowing time for planning and professional development, developing classroom management skills, fostering an understanding of inclusion and preparing service providers who are able to provide supplementary instruction aligned with whole class instruction;
- Preservation of a continuum of services in the rush for inclusion (e.g., some students still need one-on-one instruction and/or other supports);
- Lack of dedicated reading instruction beyond the elementary level, although middle and secondary students are being tested in reading; and
- Lack of flexibility in scheduling that causes students to miss out on content areas when receiving direct instruction in reading and to fall behind in those subjects (especially those requiring strong reading skills); and
- Lack of reading materials available on the students' reading levels for subjects such as science and social studies.

### Personnel

- Recruitment and retention of quality personnel in education;
- Varied levels of teacher preparation and effectiveness;
- Updating of administrators on current research and practice; and
- Discomfort of teachers (due to lack of experience and skills) with students with disabilities (or those they perceive as having disabilities).

### General Education Support and Communication

- Lack of support through the general education program for students struggling with reading, leading to inappropriate referral to special education;
- Lack of collaboration between general and special educators in the areas of professional development, planning time and modeling instructional strategies;
- Linkage of funding, accreditation and high-stakes testing that could interfere with reaching out to all the students who need reading instruction;

- Overwhelming conditions of teaching and providing related services (e.g., large class sizes/caseloads, lack of sufficient time for planning, inadequate opportunity for collaboration between teachers and related service providers, multiple responsibilities and lack of resource supports);
- Lack of communication among divisions (e.g., early childhood, special education, reading initiatives) and at various levels (e.g., local, state, federal); and
- Lack of common understanding on what to do with students who have challenges in reading due to different roles, definitions and philosophies between general and special education.

### Student/Family/Caregiver Background

- Wide range of parent and caregiver background knowledge, language and literacy skills;
- Lack of family and caregiver access to basic materials (e.g., age-appropriate and culturally-rich books, and books and resources in the child's native language), as well as to technology-based information on reading strategies; and
- Limited availability of training for parents and caregivers in language and literacy development, as well as in the area of using technology to enhance literacy skills.

### **Facilitators of Whole Class Strategies for Students with Disabilities**

*Considering the challenges identified during the previous small group discussions, participants discussed in one large group what facilitates the use of whole class strategies for reading instruction for students with disabilities. These facilitators were categorized and are summarized below.*

### Instruction and Assessment

- Using peer-assisted and research-validated strategies to promote language, academic and social skills;
- Linking reading, writing, spelling and oral language activities to promote literacy;
- Using flexible and fluid grouping and explicit instruction linked to ongoing assessment to address variations in skill level and rate of learning;
- Attending to all aspects of reading, such as:
  - normal language development milestones;
  - phonemic awareness, phonics, letter knowledge and concepts of print;
  - fluent, automatic reading of text;
  - vocabulary;
  - text comprehension;
  - written expression;
  - spelling and handwriting;
  - screening and continuous assessment to inform instruction; and
  - motivating children to read and expanding their literacy horizons;
- Using criterion-referenced assessment with benchmarks that is conducted by the teacher, quick and ongoing, linked to instruction, and includes more frequent progress monitoring for students with difficulties.

## Personnel

- Providing collaborative and integrated preservice preparation for general educators and related service providers, including:
  - courses in the teaching of reading that include a focus on emerging literacy and reading for adolescents (as a state requirement for all teacher licensing);
  - practicum experience specific to the population the professional will serve (e.g., with a mentor teacher); and
  - guidance on choosing research-based strategies that most effectively meet student needs;
- Offering on-going inservice preparation that includes modeling of promising practices;
- Monitoring for implementation by an appointed person (e.g., principal, assistant principal, instructional leader) using a checklist of teacher behaviors with clear criteria, roles and expectations; and
- Providing effective technical assistance for personnel on assistive technology related to reading.

## General Education Support and Communication

- Managing classrooms with positive behavior support (e.g., high student praise ratio);
- Ensuring reasonable class size;
- Linking funding and planning around Title I, general education and IDEA; and
- Making available multi-disciplinary collaboration and diagnostic assessment for teachers.

## Family and Community

- Facilitating on-going communication with and from parents about student's progress and home activities to support progress;
- Ensuring that libraries and resource rooms are replenished and updated with adequate materials to support the teaching of reading at all levels, as well as materials to support the adopted curriculum (e.g., teacher's guide, workbooks, supplementary materials); and
- Disseminating information about reading (e.g., emergent language, phonemic awareness and text comprehension) to parents and the general public using booklets, clinics, video, public service announcements and community centers.

## Other Facilitators

- Ensuring adequate capacity for state-level guidance and ongoing technical assistance; and
- Collecting high quality progress data and disaggregating the data (e.g., by race/ethnicity and income level) to inform instruction and prepare for high-stakes testing.

## Recommendations

*Participants were asked to make specific recommendations that would facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in reading initiatives at the federal, state and local levels. After a short period of independent reflection, policy forum participants generated the recommendations below during a full group discussion. There was no attempt to prioritize or reach consensus on these recommendations.*

### National/Federal Level

- Establish minimum competency personnel standards related to the teaching of reading for all teachers and related services providers supported by federal programs that reflect the National Reading Panel's (NRP) work on reading instruction;<sup>4</sup>
- Fund Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) to provide information to parents about reading from infancy to adolescence;
- Explore the establishment of a clearinghouse to evaluate and approve programs and products prior to dissemination in order to authenticate intervention strategies and materials (include a screening component and seal of approval);
- Establish more research/practitioner partnerships with the goal of disseminating research findings to the field;
- Create a national commission to study ways to make the teaching profession more attractive, including teacher training at the university level (e.g., increasing salaries, funding opportunities, forgiveness of loans, and professional development); and
- Expand the role of the National Institute for Literacy to include development of guidelines for adopting or evaluating reading materials (e.g., NRP list).

### State and Local Levels

- Align PreK-12 and post secondary curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional development with NRP's five components of reading instruction<sup>5</sup> in order to consolidate and maximize resources to implement and sustain a single comprehensive reading initiative;
- Examine state laws, policies and regulations to determine if, and where, there are prohibitions against coordinating funds for reading instruction;
- Include cultural competency as it relates to reading instruction in preservice and inservice preparation curricula;
- Foster access to literacy awareness for parents through community outreach strategies (e.g., child care centers, churches, libraries, pediatricians and utility bill inserts);
- Create multimedia and language-rich print materials that allow ALL children to interact with the written word (e.g., videos, book corners, books on tapes, markers and pens);
- Use "expert" or "master" teachers to model effective, research-based strategies for reading instruction; and

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.htm>

<sup>5</sup> NRP's five components of reading instruction are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension.

- Emphasize literacy and math skills in kindergarten through grade two and de-emphasize knowledge in specific content areas.

### Research

- Investigate various strategies and/or structures that facilitate reading achievement, such as year-round academic programming (e.g., nine week sessions and enrichment courses/remediation between sessions);
- Continue research on how reading instruction benefits students with significant reading disabilities;
- Conduct research on the “unintended consequences” of high-stakes testing; and
- Explore the relationship between language and reading disabilities in young children, and ways that educators, parents and caregivers can support early literacy.

### **Concluding Comments and Next Steps**

This document is intended to inform policymakers about the challenges of using whole class reading strategies for students with disabilities, and what facilitates the use of such strategies. It offers short and long-term recommendations for consideration at the federal/national, state and local levels, as well as recommendations for future research. This proceedings document has been disseminated to all state directors of special education, OSEP staff, many projects funded by the OSEP and other organizations dedicated to improving educational outcomes for all children. The document is also available for downloading from the NASDSE website at <http://www.nasdse.org/forum.htm>.

**Appendix A**  
**Participant List**

## Appendix A Participant List

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## **Appendix B**

### **Agenda**

## **Appendix B Agenda**

### **Wednesday, February 27, 2002 (at WETA)**

- 10:00            Transportation to WETA headquarters from Embassy Suites Hotel  
(Meet in hotel lobby)
- 10:30-11:30    Welcome & purpose of the meeting (Room 625)  
*Joy Markowitz, Director, Project FORUM at NASDSE*
- Greetings from NASDSE  
*Nancy Reder, Deputy Executive Director*
- Participant introductions
- Overview of satellite conference procedures and guidelines for generation of  
                  questions  
*Susan Petroff, Partner Relations Director, WETA Reading Rockets*
- 11:30-12:15    Brunch
- 12:15-1:00     Walk to production studio
- 1:00-2:30      Satellite broadcast
- 2:30-3:00      Break (with refreshments)
- 3:00-4:30      Reading instruction and students with disabilities - The view from OSEP  
*Lou Danielson, Director, Research to Practice Division, OSEP*
- Debriefing with satellite conference panelists and WETA staff
- 4:30             Adjourn for day and transportation to Embassy Suites Hotel

**Thursday, February 28, 2002 (at Embassy Suites Hotel)**

<p><i>Breakfast for hotel guests served in the lobby beginning at 6:30 a.m. Beverages will be available in the meeting room at 8:30 a.m.</i></p>
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- 9:00-9:30      Opening, introduction of newcomers, and review of day's agenda  
*Joy Markowitz*
- 9:30-10:00     Review of materials and articles brought by participants
- 10:00-10:45    What are the challenges of using whole class reading strategies with students with disabilities?  
*Small group discussions*
- 10:45-11:15    Break and hotel check out
- 11:15-11:45    Reporting out from small group discussions
- 11:45-1:00     Lunch and break (lunch provided)
- 1:00-1:45      How can educators and policy makers facilitate the use of such strategies?  
*Small group discussions*
- 1:45-2:15      Reporting out from second small group discussions
- 2:15-3:00      What can OSEP do to support effective reading instruction for students with disabilities and the inclusion of students with disabilities in national reading initiatives?  
*Small group discussions*
- 3:00-3:15      Break
- 3:15-3:45      Reporting out from third small group discussions
- 3:45-4:00      Next steps
- 4:00             Adjourn