

## **Childhood Literacy**

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In the early 1980's the federal government began to draw attention to a "widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system" through the creation of the National Commission on Excellence in Education and the resulting report, "A Nation at Risk." This report warned policymakers that if our education system continued on its current trajectory, the United States would be unable to continue to compete in the global marketplace. At that time, it was estimated that 23 million American adults were functionally illiterate and that 13-40% of youth ages 13-18 were also illiterate.

In 1995 there was a follow-up study done to measure the progress made by programs created as a result of the 1983 findings. The report published, "A Nation Still at Risk", painted a picture very similar to that of the 1983 study. In 2007, a third study was published, "America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future," this one by the Educational Testing Service. The 2007 study found that high school graduation rates were dropping across the country. It also reported that 14% of all adults were at a "Level One" reading level, which is below basic literacy. This report identified that oftentimes the children who need extra assistance with literacy skills are those who have parents that are struggling readers.

In 2015, The University of Virginia published a study titled "Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Project." This study found that about 1/3 of Virginia Students are not ready to enter Kindergarten on the first day of school. Children who enter kindergarten unprepared rarely catch up to their peers and multiple studies have reported a link between reading success in primary grades and the ability to succeed throughout the remainder of a student's academic career.

## **What are the needs in Hampton Roads and throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia?**

The National Center for Education Statistics estimates there are over 106,000 adults in Hampton Roads with below basic literacy levels.

During the 2013-2014 school year, 27% of third graders in Hampton Roads did not read at a third-grade level. Based on actuarial estimates, this will equate to over 700 high school dropouts and 2,500 high school graduates who are unable to read from the graduating class of 2023.

## **Why is this important?**

The Virginia Commission on Youth estimates that a single high school dropout costs society \$800,000 in public assistance, healthcare costs, and other services.

There is also a strong correlation between childhood poverty and poor academic performance, meaning the children of adults who are unable to earn sufficient income due to low literacy rates are more likely themselves to be behind in school, perpetuating the cycle. Addressing the needs of these children early can allow for early identification of needs and allow for provision of academic enrichment programs that can help them catch up to their peers.

When a student cannot read at their proper grade level, they will not only fall behind in subjects like reading and English, but they also will have trouble reading assignments, and therefore learning the material for other subjects such as science, math, and social studies.

## **What is currently being done in Hampton Roads and throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia?**

The goal of the Virginia State Literacy Plan is to ensure that all children have the necessary skills to become successful readers, writers, speakers, and listeners with the critical thinking skills that are required to be successful as they progress and transition through the stages of their lives from birth through high school graduation.

Under the State Literacy Plan the following programs have been developed and implemented along with many others in the Hampton Roads region and across the state:

- The Early Reading First program supports the development of early childhood centers of excellence that focus on all areas of development, especially early language, cognitive, and pre-reading skills for children primarily from low-income families.
- Even Start Family Literacy Program is designed to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and low literacy for low-income families, with children ages birth through eight, through the integration of early childhood education, adult education, parent education, and interactive parent-child literacy activities.
- Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) provides quality preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds who are not served by Head Start programs.
- 1-2-3-READ! is a researched-based, storybook-focused curriculum developed by Child Development Resources that has been proven to result in children (birth to age 3) achieving significant, measurable gains in their language and cognitive development. 1-2-3 READ! is designed to build emergent literacy in infants and toddlers through a carefully planned set of experiences that lay the foundation for reading and writing success.
- Virginia Head Start Programs is a national, federally-funded child development program for children from birth to age five. Head Start provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, dental, mental health, social services and parent involvement opportunities to low-income children and their families.
- Library of Virginia Reading Programs. The Library of Virginia works collaboratively with state organizations to promote library services and the love of reading to children and young adults.
- Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI) is designed to reduce significantly the number of children with reading problems through early diagnosis and immediate intervention. As a result of the intervention services, the essential reading skills of the identified students will be improved by the end of each grade level, kindergarten through third grade.
- Content Literacy Continuum (CLC) is a coordinated and aligned schoolwide approach to improve literacy for all students in secondary schools using a five-level model incorporating the research-validated Strategic Instruction Model (SIM).

## **America Reads**

In 1996 President Clinton started the America Reads Initiative as part of his national literacy campaign started in 1991. The goal of the campaign was to enlist 100,000,000 volunteer tutors to help give children the “personal attention they need to catch up and get ahead.” The federal government played a minimal role in the rollout of the program simply asking for volunteers and offering grants to help cover the cost of the programs that were developed as a result. ODU has a group of volunteers for this initiative in the Hampton Roads area as a part of their AmeriCorps funding and under the federal work-study program.

## References and Sources of Additional Information:

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