



**Improving Adolescent Literacy in Arizona:  
A Report to the Governor's P20 Council**

Prepared by  
Elizabeth Schneider, Vice President for State Advocacy  
&  
Rafael Heller, PhD, Senior Policy Associate  
Alliance for Excellent Education

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## A. Adolescent Literacy: The National Picture

### 1. An emerging national consensus

Over the last few decades, an enormous amount of attention has been directed toward the reading difficulties of America's young children. For instance, researchers have engaged in countless skirmishes over the relative merits of phonics and whole-language instruction in grades K–3. Pundits have lamented over and over again the fact that Johnny still can't read. And federal policymakers have made greater and greater investments in Title I, with its heavy emphasis on teaching reading in the elementary schools.

By contrast, and as the RAND Corporation put it in a recent report, adolescent literacy has been an “orphaned responsibility.” Relatively few researchers have studied the teaching of reading and writing in the middle and high schools, and few policymakers have made an effort to champion the issue. Reading specialists are scarce at the secondary level, and few high school math, history, or even language arts teachers see it as their job to teach reading and writing; in the academic disciplines that rule the upper grades, it is the teaching of *content*, not skills, that reigns supreme.

In the last few years, however, things have begun to change. Following RAND's review of adolescent literacy achievement and research, the National Writing Commission published an influential white paper in 2003, calling for a national renaissance in K–12 writing instruction. In 2004, the Alliance for Excellent Education published the landmark *Reading Next* report, surveying what is known about literacy instruction in the middle and high school grades and describing 15 elements of an effective literacy program. Also in 2004, President Bush sponsored the creation of Striving Readers, a federal program designed to complement the federal Reading First initiative, which invests \$200 million annually at the K–3 level, with a smaller but still significant investment in adolescent reading instruction. (The president requested an allocation for the Striving Readers program of \$200 million for fiscal year 2006; however, Congress seems likely to fund the program next year at its current level, of slightly below \$25 million.)

Since the beginning of 2005, the momentum to address the literacy needs of middle and high school students has increased even more. Drawing heavily on the research-based practices outlined in *Reading Next*, a number of prominent national organizations—including the National Governors Association, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the International Reading Association, and the National Association of State Boards of Education—have published their own reports on reading and writing in the middle and high schools. Together they send some very strong and remarkably consistent messages to policymakers.

- a) *The nation is facing an urgent crisis in adolescent literacy.*

According to the Nation's Report Card for 2005, only about a third of the country's eighth graders read at or above a proficient level, and that figure represents no improvement over previous years. Indeed, while long-term data show some improvement in fourth-grade reading skills, eighth-grade scores have been stagnant for 30 years. It is no surprise, then, that the U.S. Department of Education reported, in a 2003 study, that more than 1 in 10 of all *college* students are required to take remedial reading classes, and a 2001 survey by the National Association of Manufacturers showed that roughly a third of employers expressed serious concern about workers' poor reading and writing skills.

b) *Literacy instruction must continue beyond the third grade.*

In recent years, the nation's schools have made significant improvements in early reading instruction, using research-based programs to help ever-larger numbers of students master the mechanics of reading by the time they finish the third grade. This work is, and must remain, a high priority.

Yet a wealth of evidence shows that schools must *continue* to provide strong literacy instruction throughout the middle and high school years, too, focusing not just on phonics but also on vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing. At present, few of the nation's schools make a concerted effort to provide these kinds of ongoing support, and the tragic result is that millions of youngsters lose whatever momentum they had gained in K-3.

c) *Much is known about how to teach reading and writing effectively in the middle and high schools.*

As the Alliance's *Reading Next* report argues, the nation has devoted scant resources to the study of adolescent literacy. The existing research, however, is sufficient to reach a number of useful conclusions. For example, evidence clearly shows that adolescents who read several years below grade level can catch up, as long as they are given intensive, high-quality reading instruction. Likewise, the evidence shows that all students benefit from instruction in reading comprehension strategies, particularly in the academic content areas. Research also suggests that teachers of

**Alliance for Excellent Education**  
Key Elements of Effective  
Adolescent Literacy Programs

**Instruction**

1. Direct, explicit comprehension instruction
2. Effective instructional principles embedded in content
3. Motivation and self-directed learning
4. Text-based collaborative learning
5. Strategic tutoring
6. Diverse texts
7. Intensive writing
8. A technology component
9. Ongoing formative assessment of students

**Infrastructure**

10. Extended time for literacy
11. Professional development
12. Ongoing summative assessment of students and programs
13. Teacher teams
14. Leadership
15. A comprehensive and coordinated literacy program

Source: *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy*. Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004.

struggling adolescent readers should make special efforts to boost their motivation and give them opportunities to build their confidence as readers. And middle and high school students everywhere need much better access to reading materials that are not only pegged to the right reading level but also are designed to be of interest to the right age group.

- d) *Reason suggests that the same strategies are effective for English-language learners, too.*

Relatively little research has been conducted to explore whether or what sort of special considerations need to be made when teaching reading and writing to adolescents who are learning English as a second language. For now, though, researchers suggest that the same teaching strategies that work for native English speakers are likely to work for non-native speakers as well. (The Alliance for Excellent Education is presently involved in a comprehensive review of the extant research in this area; a report is due to be published in the spring of 2006.)

### **National Governors Association Key Recommendations**

#### **1. Build Support for a State Focus on Adolescent Literacy**

- a. Create a state literacy report card
- b. Lead a statewide adolescent literacy campaign
- c. Designate a state office or coordinator for adolescent literacy
- d. Establish an adolescent literacy advisory panel

#### **2. Raise Literacy Expectations Across Grades and Curricula**

- a. Assess real-world literacy demands and raise state standards
- b. Revise state standards to make literacy expectations explicit across grades and curricula
- c. Secure the support of teachers, principals, and district administrators for adolescent literacy initiatives

#### **3. Encourage and Support School and District Literacy Plans**

- a. Call for literacy plans based on effective literacy instructional practices
- b. Require schools and districts to provide interventions for struggling readers

#### **4. Build Educators' Capacity to Provide Adolescent Literacy Instruction**

- a. Strengthen teachers' licensure and preparation requirements
- b. Offer teachers specialized certification in adolescent literacy
- c. Afford teachers professional development opportunities in literacy instruction
- d. Support principal training in literacy

#### **5. Measure Progress in Adolescent Literacy at the School, District, and State Levels**

- a. Review and strengthen state assessments
- b. Improve the value and timeliness of literacy performance data

Source: *Reading To Achieve: A Governor's Guide to Adolescent Literacy*. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2005.

## 2. New state initiatives

Recognition of the long-term impact of low literacy levels, the need for continued instruction for middle and high school students, and knowledge of proven methods to assist struggling readers have prompted a number of states to make serious efforts to address the adolescent literacy crisis.

Currently, new initiatives are underway in Delaware, Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin (brief descriptions of these initiatives can be found in *A Governor's Guide to Adolescent Literacy*, published by the National Governors Association in October 2005). While it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of these programs, it is worth noting their similarities, which are indicative of researchers' and policymakers' consensus around certain key strategies. To varying degrees, all of these states focus on improving professional development in content-area literacy instruction, adopting strong literacy standards across the curriculum, and creating new systems for assessing and monitoring the reading skills of individual students.

Two additional states, Alabama and Florida, stand out both for the scale of their adolescent literacy initiatives and their foresight in creating them. The Alabama Reading Initiative, a K–12 project authorized by the state Board of Education in 1996, builds on what started out as a grassroots, professional development program. It is significant that this program was funded entirely by the business community for its first 2 years, underscoring the private sector's broad recognition of the urgent crisis

### National Association of State Boards of Education Key Recommendations

1. **Set state literacy goals and standards**, ensuring alignment with curricula and assessments, and raising literacy expectations across the curriculum for all students in all grades.
2. **Ensure that teachers have the preparation and professional development** to provide effective, content-based literacy instruction.
3. **Strategically use data** to identify student needs, design cohesive policies, and evaluate quality of implementation and impact.
4. **Require the development of district and school literacy plans** that infuse research-based literacy support strategies in all content areas. Elements of district and school plans should include
  - a. good assessment;
  - b. tiered, strategic schoolwide intervention;
  - c. organizational structures to sustain and enact these elements strategically;
  - d. committed leadership; and
  - e. interdisciplinary literacy teams.
5. **Provide districts and schools with funding, supports, and resources:**
  - a. funding;
  - b. instructional materials; and
  - c. literacy coaches.
6. **Provide state guidance and oversight to ensure strong implementation** of comprehensive quality literacy programs.

Source: *Reading at Risk: How States Can Respond to the Crisis in Adolescent Literacy*. National Association of State Boards of Education, 2005.

this country faces in adolescent literacy. Florida's Just Read! initiative, which Governor Jeb Bush created by executive order in 2001, pursues a comprehensive range of strategies, with an emphasis on data systems, teacher training requirements, and middle and high school reading courses.

The Alliance is dedicated to helping state and federal policymakers design and implement comprehensive plans for improving adolescent literacy instruction. Therefore, we were pleased to learn of Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano's strong interest in addressing middle and high school literacy and to receive an invitation from her, in the summer of 2005, to prepare a report and policy recommendations in this area for consideration by Arizona's newly formed P20 Council.

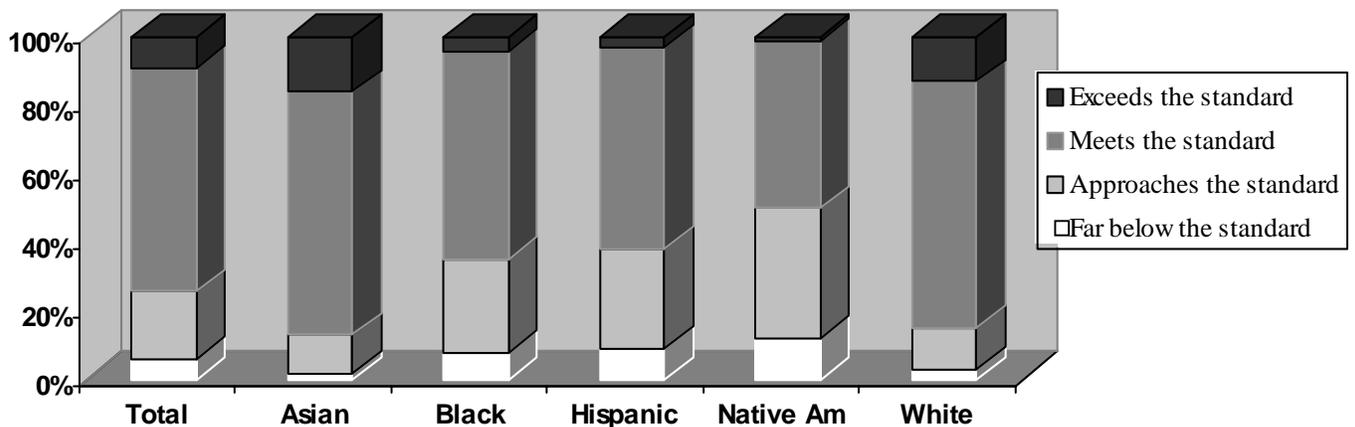
Drawing on our considerable knowledge of the research and of federal and state policymaking in middle and high reading and writing, the Alliance has worked for the past 2 months, at no charge to the state, to review existing data, gather opinions, study literacy achievement trends, identify literacy programs and resources, and consult with key educators, policymakers, and business and community leaders around the state. The present report is intended to provide a useful, evenhanded analysis of Arizona's resources, challenges, and opportunities for improving adolescent literacy instruction. We hope this report will assist the P20 Council as it moves forward in its deliberations over the best ways to improve education for all of Arizona's students.

## B. Adolescent Literacy in Arizona

### 1. What the data show

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, or the “Nation’s Report Card”), 35% of Arizona’s eighth graders read significantly below grade level, compared with a national average of 29%. Of particular concern is the achievement gap between Arizona’s white students and its Hispanic, Native American, and black students. Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) shows 15% of the state’s white eighth graders to be reading below the standard, but the figure rises to 50% of Native American, 38% of Hispanic, and 35% of black eighth graders. (White students now comprise 49% of Arizona’s public school enrollment, Hispanic students 37%, Native Americans 7%, blacks 5%, and Asian Americans 2%.)

The reading scores of Arizona’s fourth and eighth graders have remained more or less unchanged over the last 6 years of data collection (and likely for much longer, but the long-term data are not available). Yet the state’s population has been growing steadily (up 40% from 1990–2000, and up another 12% from 2000 to 2004, according to U.S. Census data), as has the percentage of residents who speak languages other than English in the home (26% of the population, ages 5 years and older, in 2004). Given that so many additional students have entered the system, many of them raised by non-English-speaking parents, the state is to be commended for holding its scores steady. But the reality is that with the increasing literacy levels required to succeed in both blue- and white-collar occupations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, “holding steady” means we are holding students back from opportunities to maximize their potential, as well as holding the state back from becoming a stronger competitor in the national and global economy.



Spring 2005 AIMS 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Reading

Further, low achievement scores predict a further set of costs to be incurred when students go on to college. Nationally, 53% of college freshman require one or more remedial courses, which costs more than \$1 billion annually in public spending. Arizona's university system, which is authorized to spend a total of \$2.5 billion in fiscal year 2005, is likely to spend \$25 million this year to pay for remediation at its public 4-year institutions alone—and remediation rates at community colleges tend to be even higher.

## **2. A statewide commitment to improving literacy instruction**

In recent years, and in keeping with national trends, Arizona has placed a strong and appropriate emphasis on early childhood education, building on what research has shown to make a significant difference for young children. For example, in 2004, Governor Napolitano led the effort to introduce voluntary all-day kindergarten statewide, beginning with those school districts with the highest percentage of students eligible for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program. This successful effort enjoyed the strong support of many in the business community, including Greater Phoenix Leadership, the Arizona Business and Education Coalition, and Southern Arizona Leadership. Likewise, a strong coalition of public- and private-sector leaders contributed to the passage of AZ READS, a K–3 initiative supported by the federal Reading First grants.

Arizona's leaders, the governor in particular, are to be particularly commended for recognizing the need to continue to support literacy achievement beyond the third grade. In her 2004 State of the State address, the governor called for a middle school endorsement for reading. This year she has also extended the One Book program—which provides a free new book to all children in the first grade—to all fourth-grade students.

Moreover, the recent creation by the governor's P20 Council emphasizes the fact that education, including the development of reading and writing skills, is a continuum, requiring careful alignment and ongoing support across the grades. The creation of the governor's Committee for Teacher Quality and Support also reflects the importance of thinking carefully about the skills and supports teachers need to help all students succeed in today's world. Similarly, Superintendent Horne and his staff have given prominence to the issue of adolescent literacy in seminars and meetings held this year by the education department's Arizona High School Renewal Initiative.

It is a very promising sign that Arizona's chief executive and chief education officer recognize the urgent need to improve middle and high school literacy instruction, and that they have expressed their desire to address that issue squarely, ranking it among the state's highest priorities for the coming years.

Also, in our conversations with other policymakers, K–12 educators, university faculty and administrators, researchers, businesspeople, community leaders, and other key constituents across Arizona, we heard unanimous agreement about the vital importance of strengthening the reading and writing skills of the state's adolescents. Without exception, the people we spoke with (see Appendix A) described the teaching of literacy—including not just the mechanics of reading but also high-level reading comprehension, writing, and other communication skills—as a linchpin of the state's standards-based education reform movement. Already, many

Arizonans recognize that (as more than one person told us) the state “cannot afford not to address this issue.”

If middle and high school students cannot understand their textbooks, laboratory instructions, loan applications, newspapers, and other essential texts, then they cannot succeed in their math and science classes, college seminars, job training programs, and so on. If they can read and write capably, however, they have a real opportunity to succeed in any endeavor.

### **3. Existing strengths and resources**

Given the consensus that we have observed in discussions with key policymakers, educators, business leaders, and others, we believe Arizona to be well positioned to undertake a statewide adolescent literacy initiative. Further, in addition to the requisite political leadership, the state has many other strengths, as outlined in detail below.

- a) *Arizona has rigorous, coherent standards in reading and writing, which are well aligned with state assessments.*

According to the Fordham Foundation’s recent (2005) review of reading standards across the country, Arizona’s standards, revised in 2003 (with writing standards added in 2004), provide relatively clear and useful guidelines for the state’s teachers to follow. Fordham ranked Arizona’s standards document 13th out of 50 states.

Further, Arizona’s reading and especially its writing standards are presented in such a way that they can be used to provide guidance for teachers in every academic content area. Of the three strands included in the reading standards, one has to do with the reading of literary texts (and, by implication, applies specifically to the English department). However, the two other strands focus on generic reading skills and the comprehension of expository texts, neither of which are the exclusive purview of reading or language arts teachers. Indeed, the reading standards document includes an introductory rationale explicitly stating that “The interdependency of reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and presenting requires that language arts skills be integrated in two ways: Within language arts [and] across other content areas.”

At present, such collective responsibility for the teaching of reading and writing is not reflected in the standards documents specific to mathematics, English, social studies, and the sciences. But the reading and writing standards themselves are comprehensive, research based, and coherent, and one could easily interpret them to apply to all of these content areas.

- b) *Arizona has existing statewide and local initiatives related to literacy.*

Promising design elements for effective literacy support already exist in Arizona’s K–3 statewide reading initiative as well as in literacy intervention programs in place in some schools and districts. This infrastructure might provide a model for creating additional programs and initiatives targeted to the middle and high school grades. For example, AZ READS funds a county-based professional development network, whereby

successful elementary reading teachers are assigned for a 3-year period to coach other teachers in the region. This system could provide a template for professional development for middle and high school literacy instruction. (Note also that in November 2005 the International Reading Association, in collaboration with the disciplinary associations representing teachers of math, science, English, and social studies, published *Standards for Literacy Coaches*, giving some much-needed clarity to the coach's role and responsibilities.)

Several Arizona schools and districts also have programs in place that could serve as models for supporting literacy across the content areas and providing intensive literacy

### **International Reading Association Key Elements of Literacy Coaching**

#### **Leadership Standards**

##### **STANDARD 1: SKILLFUL COLLABORATORS**

Content-area literacy coaches are skilled collaborators who function effectively in middle school and/or high school settings.

##### **STANDARD 2: SKILLFUL JOB-EMBEDDED COACHES**

Content-area literacy coaches are skilled instructional coaches for secondary teachers in the core content areas of English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

##### **STANDARD 3: SKILLFUL EVALUATORS OF LITERACY NEEDS**

Content-area literacy coaches are skilled evaluators of literacy needs within various subject areas and are able to collaborate with secondary school leadership teams and teachers to interpret and use assessment data to inform instruction.

#### **Content-Area Standard**

##### **STANDARD 4: SKILLFUL INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGISTS**

Content-area literacy coaches are accomplished middle and high school teachers who are skilled in developing and implementing instructional strategies to improve academic literacy in the specific content area.

Source: *Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches*. International Reading Association, 2005.

interventions to all struggling readers. For instance, since 1989 the Phoenix Union School District has utilized the concept of "literacy cadres," whereby a reading coach meets with interested teachers (who are paid their hourly rate to meet once or twice a month for 2–3 hours after school) to assist with literacy strategies in the content areas.

Further, 28 Arizona school districts have active career ladder programs, which use local and state funds to reward teachers for meeting specified performance goals, which (if they do not already do so) could easily be revised to emphasize student achievement in reading and writing. Likewise, 30 districts now provide salary incentives for teachers to pursue and earn advanced certification through the National Board for Professional

Teaching Standards, which encourages the teaching of reading and writing in the content areas.

Additionally, the Arizona School Administrators recently launched the Breaking Ranks II project, funded by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. While the initiative is meant to foster overall school improvement, the NASSP has a special interest in adolescent literacy, and it is likely to encourage Arizona's participants to focus on that issue. In fact, NASSP just released, in November 2005, its report *Creating a Culture of Literacy: A Guide for Middle and High School Principals*, and is in the process of distributing copies to every secondary school principal in the country.

- c) *Many Arizona business and foundation leaders are eager to participate in a statewide adolescent literacy initiative.*

Representatives from the Arizona Business and Education Coalition, the Rodel Foundation, Intel Corporation, the Center for the Future of Arizona, the Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and other organizations have expressed their interest in raising the literacy skills of Arizona's adolescents, and they have indicated a willingness to support well-crafted statewide projects in this area.

- d) *Arizona contains many nationally prominent education researchers, a number of whom are experts in adolescent literacy.*

Together, the University of Arizona, Arizona State, and Northern Arizona boast as fine a collection of adolescent literacy researchers as can be found in any state in the nation (see Appendix B), and many of those researchers have long and distinguished records of service to the state's schools, teachers, and students. Further, organizations such as WestEd, Think AZ, the Arizona K-12 Center, and the Morrison Institute of Public Policy combine to give the state an impressive capacity to identify literacy needs, evaluate programs, provide technical assistance, and communicate important findings.

- e) *Numerous community-, university-, and district-based projects are working to improve adolescent literacy instruction and achievement.*

No single organization keeps track of Arizona's numerous projects and programs working in the area of adolescent literacy, so there is no way to tell exactly how many of those projects and programs exist. Nevertheless, we were able to compile an extensive list (see Appendix B) of organizations that are interested in enhancing literacy among middle and high students or that are already engaged in efforts toward that end. While it may be difficult to coordinate among these agencies, or even to identify all of them, they represent an enormous pool of talent, expertise, and commitment, and their work should be tapped or supported as part of any statewide adolescent literacy initiative.

#### 4. Concerns and challenges

To date, we have seen a strong consensus about the need to improve the literacy skills of Arizona's middle and high school students. We have heard remarkably consistent opinions on the severity of the crisis, the economic and social consequences that could follow, and the benefit of investing now in better literacy instruction rather than incurring even greater costs later. However, while we have been encouraged by these basic points of agreement, we have also heard many notes of caution. A few challenges, listed below, strike us as particularly important for the P20 Council to consider as it proceeds with its work.

- a) *While state tests and data systems are improving, Arizona has little capacity to assess the literacy needs of individual students.*

AZ READS requires that third-grade students who score below the passing score on the AIMS reading test be given a diagnostic reading assessment and placed in an appropriate intervention program, with the goal of helping them catch up to grade level as soon as possible. Such additional assessment is needed to determine those students' precise reading levels, strengths, and weaknesses, to identify specific reading disabilities, and to distinguish problems of English-language fluency from deeper literacy problems, which may or may not exist in students' native languages.

For Arizona students in grades 4–12, however, no such provision currently exists. Some individual middle and high school districts perform a diagnostic reading assessment of students who fail the reading portion of AIMS. But our research and interviews give us the impression that this practice is unusual, and that few districts make it a rule to perform such assessments or to provide the necessary reading interventions.

A survey of Arizona's districts would help determine how many districts do in fact practice this sort of careful diagnostic assessment, but unless and until such a survey is conducted, we can only infer that few districts have the capacity to choose from among the many commercial and free assessment tools that are available and then to administer those assessments accurately, interpret them, and use the results to assign students to appropriate courses or reading interventions.

- b) *Arizona's teacher education system focuses very little attention on issues related to literacy in the upper grades.*

While Arizona does offer a special endorsement in reading instruction, that endorsement has proved to be attractive mainly to elementary-level teachers, and it does not require specific coursework or other training in teaching reading and writing in the academic content areas.

- c) *Arizona lacks policy levers with which to regulate or improve the in-service professional development of teachers.*

If reading and writing are to be taught more effectively in grades 4–12, Arizona's teachers will need intensive and ongoing support to help them provide such instruction.

However, the state currently lacks policy levers and funding streams that would enable it to invest in stronger professional development for teachers, or to ensure that vendors and training programs are meeting basic standards of effectiveness (such as those articulated by the National Staff Development Council, the most prominent organization in this field).

- d) *Arizona's regional differences complicate efforts to establish statewide policies.*

It will come as no surprise to members of the P20 Council, but in our discussions with Arizonans we have been struck by the intense level of concern about matters related to centralized and local decisionmaking. Clearly, any plans to address adolescent literacy will have to take into account the very different educational needs, opportunities, and resources to be found in different parts of the state. While earlier legislation has helped narrow gaps in district funding, middle and high school students in urban, suburban, and rural and/or primarily Native American districts, and districts with very different numbers of native and non-native English speakers, may require very different kinds of investments in and supports for literacy instruction.

- e) *While Arizona's reading and writing standards can be interpreted as calling for literacy skills to be taught in all of the academic content areas, the state's content-area standards themselves are silent on this issue.*

At present, Arizona's standards documents invite some confusion as to whose responsibility it is, precisely, to ensure that students acquire key reading and writing skills. The standards documents for math, science, English, and social studies appear to suggest that each of those sets of discipline-specific content and skills is the purview of the given academic department. However, and with the exception of items related to the interpretation of literary texts, the reading and writing standards imply no such departmental ownership, placing the responsibility for teaching these skills nowhere in particular.

On the one hand, this ambiguity may permit the state to assert that each department shares the responsibility for literacy instruction. On the other hand, it may also give them leeway to ignore that responsibility.

- f) *Arizona's K-8 teaching certificate fails to account for important differences in how reading should be taught in grades K-3 and grades 4-8.*

In her 2004 State of the State address, Governor Napolitano called attention to this weakness in the current teacher licensure system and recommended the creation of a dedicated middle school endorsement as a solution. To date, the Arizona Board of Education has taken no action on this issue, but we believe it merits attention. We have serious concern that the current licensure system gives short shrift to adolescent literacy instruction. If preservice programs focus exclusively on teaching the mechanics of reading that are so important in grades K-3, they leave new fourth- to eighth-grade teachers unprepared to teach reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing, which become more salient beginning in those grades.

## C. Policy Recommendations

Based on our understanding of Arizona’s educational challenges and resources, and drawing from our knowledge of successful adolescent literacy programs across the country, we urge the state to take action in five areas:

1. *Statewide Coordination*      Launch a statewide adolescent literacy initiative, building on the already established emphasis on K–3 literacy, to promote effective reading and writing instruction throughout the K–12 continuum.
2. *Diagnostic Assessment*      Build school and district capacity to assess struggling readers’ specific needs and/or disabilities.
3. *Reading Interventions*      Provide targeted reading interventions for middle and high school students who read far below grade level.
4. *Professional Development*      Put reading and writing instruction at the center of an effective, ongoing professional development program for administrators and teachers in all content areas.
5. *Public Awareness & Support*      Pursue some initial, small-scale measures designed to raise public awareness of the adolescent literacy crisis, signal the state’s commitment to addressing it, and build support for the larger initiative.

Below, we describe these recommendations in detail.

### **1. Launch a statewide adolescent literacy initiative.**

The present moment offers a rare and exciting opportunity to strengthen adolescent literacy instruction throughout Arizona. Not only have the governor, the superintendent, and the Board of Education expressed their mutual concern over low student achievement in this area, but the business community, higher education, and school leaders appear to share this sense of urgency. In meeting and talking with a wide range of policymakers, educators, researchers, and other stakeholders, we have heard nothing but agreement about the scope of the crisis and the need for a response.

The current momentum could be harnessed effectively. The recent creation of the P20 Council encourages all stakeholders to adopt the comprehensive view of literacy learning that researchers strongly recommend. Evidence overwhelmingly suggests that reading and writing instruction must occur in every grade and across all content areas or students lose the momentum they gain in the elementary years. We recommend that the P20 Council perform a number of actions.

- a) **Create an office charged with coordinating this initiative.** While not necessarily requiring a large budget or significant regulatory authority, such an office would galvanize and provide leadership for the many disparate literacy projects and reforms now underway in the state.

The office could be housed within the Arizona Board of Education, the governor's office, the Department of Education, the P20 Council itself, or another appropriate location. This office would serve as the focal point of the statewide initiative. The activities it might undertake include

- defining and communicating specific goals for improving the reading and writing skills of Arizona's middle and high school students;
- monitoring overall state progress toward meeting these literacy goals;
- monitoring school and district gains on literacy assessments;
- building public awareness of the crisis in adolescent literacy;
- coordinating among statewide and local literacy projects and professional development programs;
- helping low-income districts and schools identify and obtain high-quality, age-appropriate reading materials; and
- following and disseminating the emerging research on reading comprehension, writing instruction, the teaching of English-language learners, and other key topics.

- b) **Appoint an expert panel to advise the initiative.** We recommend that this initiative—and specifically the office that coordinates its work—be advised by a statewide adolescent literacy panel, which would help build a cadre of public- and private-sector supporters on this issue, and would take advantage of the significant expertise that exists in Arizona's universities, industries, schools, and communities. As we discovered during the preparation of this report, many longtime Arizona educators and policymakers have worked in the field of literacy instruction for years but have never met or, in some cases, been aware of one another. The dialogue among them that has been initiated by the Alliance's work should be continued, and a panel of this type would provide a mechanism for doing so.

## **2. Require districts and schools to perform a diagnostic reading assessment of middle and high school students who score below a proficient level on state reading tests.**

We cannot overstate how important it is to gauge the precise nature of individual students' reading difficulties—especially at points of transition, such as the beginning of the middle and high school grades—so that they can be placed in appropriate classes and given the kinds of instruction they need. We recommend that the state

- a) **Require that all middle and high school students who score below a designated level on the reading portion of AIMS be given diagnostic assessments** to screen them for reading disabilities, to identify those who would benefit from targeted

interventions in phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension, or other key skills, and to ensure that schools and districts can gauge their staff capacity needs.

- b) **Provide districts with training opportunities and technical assistance** to help them perform those initial diagnostic screenings and then to assess students on a regular and ongoing basis, in order to track progress and adjust teaching strategies as needed.

Evidence suggests that every year, millions of America's middle and high school students are placed in remedial reading courses that focus on word recognition and phonics even though they have mastered those skills already, and even though their real need is for explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies, with attention to the different strategies and skills used in different academic content areas and nonacademic settings. For every state in the nation—Arizona included—such imprecise assessment of students' needs and abilities results in a colossal waste of human talent and school resources.

Arizona's existing achievement tests, AIMS and the Terra Nova, can be used to flag students who might require intervention, tutoring, or other services. However, those tests alone are not sufficient to determine students' individual needs. A subsequent diagnostic screening is crucial to figuring out whether a student struggles with dyslexia or another disability, needs intensive help with basic decoding skills, or would benefit from explicit learning strategies to help them better understand what they read. Such diagnostic screening is particularly important in states, such as Arizona, that have large populations of English-language learners and Native American students; national research suggests that, absent such careful assessment, disproportionate numbers of those students are placed incorrectly in special education and/or remedial reading classes.

### **3. Require and/or create incentives for districts and schools to provide specialized, intensive reading interventions for students who need them.**

Schools and districts should have the capacity not only to assess the reading skills of every student but also to act on those assessments by placing students in appropriate classes and programs. We advise the state to

- a) **Encourage districts to give individual schools the flexibility to schedule time-intensive, dedicated reading classes for students who need them**, so those students can catch up to their peers without being pulled out of and falling behind in other classes.

In most schools students can be found who, while they do not have a particular disability, read far below grade level. These students may continue to struggle with phonics, or with reading quickly and accurately, or with understanding anything but the simplest texts.

Research strongly suggests that such students can and often do catch up to grade level when they are given intensive, targeted, high-quality reading intervention programs, *especially* if those programs are allocated extra time outside of the regular curriculum.

- b) **Help districts and schools design or purchase high-quality reading programs meant specifically to help middle and high school students who read far below grade level.** At present, the intervention most widely used in Arizona is the computer-mediated Read 180 program, published by Scholastic, Inc.; the Phoenix Union District is now implementing this program, and several other districts recently purchased it for use in some of their high schools. However, many other well-regarded reading intervention programs exist, both commercial and nonprofit, and we do not endorse any of them in particular. Nor do we have a position on the relative merits of homegrown, commercial, and nonprofit programs. We *do* advise, however, that any intervention be consistent with the research on effective literacy instruction (as described in *Reading Next*), that it include a strong focus on professional development, and that it be chosen carefully, implemented fully, and be subject to rigorous and ongoing evaluation.

#### **4. Require and/or create incentives for all middle and high school administrators and teachers—in *all* content areas—to study the basic principles of effective reading and writing instruction.**

Ideally, teacher education and professional development programs would help all middle and high school teachers and administrators understand the basic principles of reading and writing instruction across the continuum of literacy development, from decoding to fluency to the comprehension and writing of advanced, content-rich texts. The fact is, however, that very few of the nation's novice or veteran teachers—and hardly any outside the field of English/language arts—receive focused and ongoing training in these areas. As is true in most other states, Arizona's content-area standards currently fail to specify that such training is necessary. We recommend that the state

- a) **Revise its math, science, English, and social studies standards to include those reading and writing skills that are specific to the particular discipline.** Not every teacher needs to be a reading specialist, but all teachers should see it as their job to ensure that students can fully comprehend their textbooks, classroom assignments, and other disciplinary texts; recognize the particular written genres and conventions used in the given discipline; and write clear, capable, and effective texts of their own, using those genres and conventions appropriately. In order to become a competent member of any academic discipline, one must be able to communicate with other members of that discipline, and standards documents should make that clear.
- b) **Offer ongoing professional development for literacy instruction to all middle and high school teachers in the state.** Research shows clearly that professional development is most effective when it focuses on questions and concerns that arise from teachers' actual experience in the classroom, engages them in discussion of their academic content, and brings them together on a regular and ongoing basis, rather than sending them to a generic, onetime workshop.

The professional development model created for the K–3 AZ READS program may offer a useful template for extending this support to the upper grades. Currently, the program funds regional literacy centers in each of Arizona’s 15 counties (with three in Maricopa County and two in Pima County). Each office has at least one state reading specialist, typically a teacher on loan for 3 years, who provides professional development and technical assistance to schools in that county. When these teachers return to their districts, they can serve as a tremendous resource.

However, the P20 Council will need to explore in more depth whether this model is having the desired impact, whether it would work to support middle and high school teachers—whether there are enough adolescent literacy experts to serve as coaches, for example—and whether the state can provide sufficient resources to pay for such a system, in lieu of the federal funding with which AZ READS pays the salaries of its reading coaches.

- c) **Identify and reward existing high-quality professional development programs devoted to literacy instruction.** The state currently identifies and recognizes excellent teachers through Governor Napolitano’s Master Teachers Program. A similar program could be developed to identify and recognize not individual teachers but whole professional development programs, directed by either a school or district.
- d) **Change teacher certification requirements and/or create incentives for middle and high school teaching candidates to complete a minimum number of credit hours in content-area literacy instruction.** Every teacher should know how to integrate meaningful reading and writing activities into their content areas. Such instruction is essential not only to shore up students’ overall literacy skills but also to allow them to master the academic content at hand. One cannot truly learn math, history, or biology without learning how to read and communicate in the languages of those fields.
- e) **Offer meaningful, discipline-specific middle and high school reading endorsements.** Currently, Arizona offers a generic K–12 reading endorsement, which is pursued primarily by elementary-level teachers. Few districts offer a significant salary increase to those who obtain it, and its only requirement is to complete 15 graduate-level credit hours (but not necessarily to complete a rigorous or coherent curriculum). A better alternative would be to design a meaningful sequence of courses in content-area literacy instruction, require that qualified university faculty teach the courses, and provide a strong incentive to pursue the endorsement and/or demonstrate effectiveness in the classroom (such as a significant salary increase and the opportunity to serve as a literacy coach and/or mentor to other teachers).
- f) **Create a strong incentive for practicing or new middle and high school principals to complete a state-approved professional development program in adolescent literacy instruction, assessment, and leadership.**

Teachers and administrators should have at least enough understanding of the issues to be able to give students, parents, and community members clear and consistent messages about literacy—they ought to be on the same page, that is, with respect to the

importance of assessing students' literacy skills, providing intensive support for students who read far below grade level, teaching all students strategies for comprehending advanced, content-specific texts, and giving all students regular opportunities to produce and receive feedback on various kinds of writing.

- g) **Create a competitive grant program to help districts offer—and pay teachers and administrators to participate in—high-quality, ongoing professional development that focuses on literacy instruction across the content areas.** In addition to requiring that teaching candidates complete a minimum number of course hours in content-area literacy instruction, and in addition to offering practicing teachers a meaningful endorsement in this area, the state should also encourage districts to make further efforts to help teachers and administrators develop their skills as literacy educators. As research strongly suggests, the best professional development programs are intensive, site based, and ongoing, providing educators meaningful opportunities to analyze and discuss their own and their colleagues' teaching and to help one another to hone their skills.

## **5. Take initial steps to build public awareness and support.**

In order to signal the state's commitment to adolescent literacy, to build public awareness and support for the larger initiative, and to gain momentum going into the upcoming legislative session, we recommend that the P20 Council explore options for some “quick wins” and media campaign strategies in this area. This might include efforts to

- a) **Build on Governor Napolitano's One Book program by partnering with state business leaders and philanthropies to offer every Arizona middle and high school student a free magazine subscription,** renewable at the beginning of the following academic year. Ideally, students would be encouraged to choose from an extensive list of magazines, representing a wide range of interests.
- b) **Fully fund the Arizona K–12 Center** and instruct it to gather and disseminate information on promising literacy projects, reading interventions, and related professional development programs in the state.
- c) **Create a statewide book club or celebration of reading,** in order to highlight local authors, sponsor reading events and contests, encourage community-based discussions of particular books, and otherwise reinforce the value of reading. (This measure could be patterned after programs launched as part of Just Read, Florida! and Read on Wisconsin!)
- d) **Hold a statewide summit on adolescent literacy,** providing opportunities for national experts to lend their support to the larger initiative, and for Arizona's educators, policymakers, business leaders, civic groups, and others to continue building relationships and to signal to the public their commitment to this work.
- e) **Provide special awards and public recognition for schools and/or districts that make significant progress in reading and writing achievement.**

- f) **Encourage private and corporate philanthropies to partner with individual schools and/or districts**, in order to help them obtain appropriate, high-quality reading materials, reading intervention programs, and other resources.
- g) **Take advantage of the bully pulpit** by having the governor, superintendent, additional members of the P20 Council, and other public figures promote the initiative in op-ed pieces and speeches, and at events around the state.

## Appendix A: Individuals Consulted for This Report

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Patricia Anders       | Professor, School of Education, University of Arizona            |
| Jean Anderson         | Curriculum Director, Phoenix Union School District               |
| Cathleen Barton       | U.S. Education Manager, Intel Corporation                        |
| Virgil Brown Jr.      | Board Member, Chinle School District                             |
| Karen Butterfield     | Deputy Associate Superintendent, Arizona Department of Education |
| Susan Carlson         | Executive Director, Arizona Business and Education Council       |
| Michael Curd          | Director of Education, Harrison Middleton University             |
| Donna Davis           | Vice President of Programs, Arizona Communities in Schools       |
| Matthew A. Diethelm   | President, Arizona State Board of Education                      |
| Daniel Fontes         | Superintendent, Santa Cruz Valley Unified School District        |
| Sybil Francis         | Executive Director, Center for the Future of Arizona             |
| Eugene Garcia         | Dean of the College of Education, Arizona State University       |
| Harry Garewell        | President and CEO, Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce          |
| Nan Gillespie         | Director of Secondary Curriculum, Peoria USD                     |
| Anne-Marie Hall       | Southern Arizona Writing Project                                 |
| Holly Henley          | Public Library Development Consultant, Arizona State Library     |
| Becky Hill            | Education Advisor to Governor Napolitano                         |
| Sandy Jacobs          | Senior Education Program Specialist for Reading First            |
| Peggy Jordan          | Assoc. Director, Youth Preparation & Minority Recruitment, ASU   |
| Rep. Anne Kirkpatrick | Arizona House Committee on Education                             |
| Paul Koehler          | Director of Policy Program, WestEd                               |
| Marie Mancuso         | Director/Coordinator, AZ READS/Reading First                     |
| Ron Marx              | Dean of the School of Education, University of Arizona           |
| David Moore           | Professor, College of Education, Arizona State University        |
| Kate Mueller          | Principal, Rio Rico High School                                  |
| Kristen Phelps        | Administrator for K–12 Curriculum, Peoria USD                    |
| Carol G. Peck         | President and CEO, Rodel Charitable Foundation of Arizona        |
| Debra Raeder          | Executive Director, P20 Council                                  |
| Lynn Reed             | Executive Director, Literacy Volunteers of Maricopa              |
| Kristen Rex           | Junior High School Principal, Humboldt School District           |

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Ralph Romero    | Chair, Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center     |
| Helen Rosen     | Director of Education Programs, Arizona Community Foundation |
| Cindy Rudrud    | High School Principal, Peoria School District                |
| Kent Scribner   | Superintendent, Isaac Elementary School District             |
| Diane Smith     | Executive Director, Greater Phoenix Management Council       |
| Bill R. Stuart  | Executive Director, Arizona Rural Schools Association        |
| Dale Tsosie     | President, Paige USD, & Native American Caucus leader        |
| Maggie Westhoff | Staff Development Council of Arizona                         |
| Kathy Wiebke    | Acting Director, K–12 Center, Northern Arizona University    |
| Vince Yanez     | Executive Director, Arizona State Board of Education         |
| Josephine Young | Professor, College of Education, Arizona State University    |
| Jim Zaharis     | Vice President, Greater Phoenix Leadership                   |

## Appendix B: Relevant Arizona Organizations & Institutions

### **Governmental Organizations**

Arizona Board of Regents  
Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education  
Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center  
Arizona Department of Education  
Arizona State Library, Archives, and Public Records  
Governor's Office  
    Arizona Teacher Excellence Project  
    Council on Innovation and Technology  
    Governor's Committee for Teacher Quality and Support  
    P20 Council

### **Business Leadership Organizations**

Arizona Business and Education Coalition  
Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Phoenix Leadership Coalition  
Greater Phoenix Management Council  
Intel Corp.  
Junior Achievement of Arizona, Inc.  
Rodel Charitable Foundation of Arizona  
Southern Arizona Leadership Council

### **Education Organizations**

Alliance for School Choice  
America Reads, America Counts  
Arizona Education Association  
Arizona Educational Foundation  
Arizona English Teachers Association  
Arizona Federation of Teacher Unions  
Arizona K12 Center (at Northern Arizona University)  
Arizona Private Schools Association  
Arizona PTA  
Arizona Rural Schools Association  
Arizona School Administrators  
Arizona School Boards Association  
Career and Technical Education Arizona  
Center for Indian Education (at Arizona State University)  
Communities in Schools

GEAR UP (at Northern Arizona University)  
IDEAL Teaching Initiative  
Literacy Volunteers of Maricopa County  
Maricopa Educational Services Agency  
National Alliance of Black School Educators  
National Center for Teacher Education  
Northern Arizona Writing Project  
Scottsdale Education Foundation  
Southern Arizona Writing Project  
Staff Development Council of Arizona  
Voices for Education  
Yuma Education Consortium

### **Research and Policy Organizations**

Arizona Latino Research Enterprise  
Center for the Future of Arizona  
Center for Workforce Development (at Maricopa Community College)  
Children’s Action Alliance  
Goldwater Institute  
Libraries for the Future  
Morrison Institute (at Arizona State University)  
THINK AZ  
WestEd

### **Other Stakeholder Organizations**

Chicanos Por La Causa  
Rotary Club of Tucson  
Valley of the Sun United Way  
Burton Barr Library  
Intertribal Council

### **University-Based Scholars with Expertise Relevant to Adolescent Literacy**

#### Arizona State University

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Carole Edelsky   | (language education, literacy)                                |
| Christian Faltis | (second-language acquisition)                                 |
| Eugene Garcia    | (language education, bilingualism)                            |
| Barbara Guzzetti | (adolescent literacy)   |
| Alleen Nilsen    | (adolescent literature, literacy, and vocabulary development) |
| Jeff MacSwan     | (bilingualism, language assessment for linguistic minorities) |
| David Moore      | (adolescent literacy)   |

Karen Smith (middle school literacy, children's literature)  
Josephine Marsh Young (adolescent literacy)  
Terrence Wiley (bilingualism, literacy)

Northern Arizona University

Roger Bacon (literacy and technology)  
Nancy Barron (literacy and technology)  
Jean Boreen (adolescent literature)  
William Crawford (second-language acquisition)  
Jean Kukowski Faust (second-language literacy, curriculum development)  
William Grabe (literacy)  
Sibylle Gruber (college writing)  
Joan Jamieson (language assessment)  
Kim McDonough (second-language acquisition)  
Mary McGroarty (bilingualism)  
John Rothfork (literacy and technology)  
Fredricka Stoller (second-language literacy, curriculum development)

University of Arizona

Patricia Anders (adolescent literacy and teacher education)  
J. David Betts (literacy and technology, literacy and the arts)  
Luis Moll (psychology and literacy)  
Richard Ruiz (education of language-minority children)  
Kathy Short (children's literature)  
Regina Siquieros (American Indian language development)

## Appendix C: Reports Cited

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