

## **Reading is Learning**

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Everyone needs to learn to read. No one will argue against this statement. Teaching students to read is a major effort in kindergarten through third grade. Teachers and students work on reading skills much of every school day. Books are sent home for evening reading and parents are encouraged to sign when they and their child have read together. Former Governor Taft introduced "Ohio Reads", a program that promoted the involvement of the community in working with young students to get all children reading on grade level by the end of third grade. Bringing volunteers into the school building to give children the opportunity to read to them is still very important.

Teaching reading has been deemed less important as students move into the middle grades where they spend more time studying science, health, math and social studies in greater detail and complexity. Teachers in middle grades and high school have concentrated their efforts on teaching content in subject areas. This is vital if our students are going to be prepared for the post-secondary training required for well-paying jobs.

The problem of "adolescent literacy" has gained notice as we have asked our students to learn more complex subjects. Learning to read is only a first step, gaining proficiency in reading more technical information and being able to use that information is a more intense need. At school, content area teachers are encouraged to expose students to a wide range of texts, to focus reading and writing assignments on understanding the big picture, not just individual facts, and to discuss the variability of the ideas and information that students encounter in their reading.

The middle and high school courses require students to learn more than ever before. As Dr. Susan Tave Zelman, our state Superintendent of Public Instruction, says, "Literacy is our number one reason why our children make it – or don't make it in school."

In all of my articles I get around to how everyone can help in educating the children of Ohio. As students get older, it becomes more important that they are asked to work hard to learn because what they are learning will have meaning in their lives. Is there a teenager in the world who has listened to the advice of their parents and teachers and not dismissed much of it because they have heard it too many times? All adults deal with complex reading. Think about your job or an interest you have that requires reading complex, sometimes conflicting, information, thinking about what you have read, following specific directions or discussing the ideas presented with fellow workers or a customer. We all do it, every day.

We need to encourage our children to read and to discuss. We can help them find reading material that matches their interests or share manuals or reading we use in our adult lives. Children and young people in your life might need to visit the library to complete a report. Librarians all over the state would be happy to help a student learn to research a topic of interest. Perhaps you have some time to volunteer at school, to tutor, or to work with a teacher. Could the local business you work in or represent become a partner in education by connecting a classroom full of students to the complex ideas you wrestle daily? Relevance is a big concern as teachers work to keep students engaged in learning. The work of members of the community can provide that relevance. If you think you could offer that relevance to the study of a subject, whether it is reading, science, math, or history, call the school and ask with whom you might discuss the possibility of working with a class one time or over a period of time.

Let's all work together to help our students develop the literacy skills – reading, understanding, writing and evaluation of ideas – that will serve them well in school and throughout life.