

EQUITABLE LITERACY FOR ALL STUDENTS

Adopted by the Statewide Annual Meeting Delegates April 2023

- WHEREAS,** The 2022 results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed that only 31% of California 4th graders performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level and 42% performed below NAEP Basic level of reading proficiency; and
- WHEREAS,** It has been demonstrated that by the end of first grade, 95% of students can learn to read if taught using comprehensive, evidence-based, structured literacy curricula that include, but is not limited to these essential components of learning to read: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Reading Fluency, Vocabulary, Text Comprehension, Knowledge Building, Oral Language teaching methods; and
- WHEREAS,** As reported by Yale University, an achievement gap exists as early as 1st grade between dyslexic and typical readers, but that achievement gap can potentially be narrowed with early reading interventions with evidence-based, structured literacy instruction. Further, 3 out of 4 students who do not read well in third grade remain poor readers in high school and beyond; and
- WHEREAS,** Evidence-based research shows students who experience reading failure face social, emotional, and mental health challenges, including but not limited to severe anxiety, depression, and trauma, at a rate 2 to 5 times greater than their peers; and
- WHEREAS,** A large percentage of youth involved in the justice system have low academic reading achievement. Higher levels of literacy are associated with greater success at achieving employment on release, and lower rates of re-arrest, and recidivism; and
- WHEREAS,** There is substantial evidence that illiteracy, including that from dyslexia, results in significant social and economic costs; and
- WHEREAS,** Senate Bill 488 (Rubio, 2022) requires all accredited teacher preparation programs to meet the reading instruction competence assessment standards that align with evidence-based preparation programs, and requires the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) to revise and strengthen standards for teacher licensure that incorporate both evidence-based structured literacy and the California Dyslexia guidelines; and
- WHEREAS,** The implementation of SB 488 (Rubio 2022), which calls for strengthening of teacher preparation programs and state licensure requirements aligned with evidence-based structural literacy, is vital for the equitable literacy of all students
- RESOLVED,** That the California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts advocate for legislation and public policies that require public schools to conduct K-4th grade universal screenings for all children at entering and exiting each grade

level, to identify those at risk of reading and literacy disorders; and screen for reading proficiency; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts advocate for legislation and public policies that ensure children who are not reading proficiently upon entering or exiting grade levels K-4 are provided additional support and instruction to ensure their rights to equal access to all aspects of their education; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts advocate for legislation and public policies to ensure that if the majority of children in a K-4th grade classroom are not reading at grade level proficiency as defined by state standards, the whole school or district needs to make changes to its literacy program to ensure it meets the needs of students through evidence-based, structured literacy instruction; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts work with schools, school districts, and families to educate them regarding evidence-based, structured literacy instruction, and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA and its units, councils, and districts advocate for legislation and public policies that ensure all students are taught reading based on comprehensive, evidence-based, structured literacy curricula; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the California State PTA, its units, councils, and districts support the establishment of a taskforce of experts in the field of evidence-based structured literacy to ensure creation and implementation of a statewide comprehensive literacy plan that includes, but is not limited to teacher assessment, preparation, coaching, and professional development requirements.

Background Summary

In 2020, Randi Weingarten, president of American Federal of Teachers (AFT), the second largest teacher’s labor union in the U.S., wrote a foreword to Dr. Louisa C. Moats’ report:

“Reading is not simply a desire; it is a fundamental skill necessary for virtually everything we do. And we need to ensure all of us, particularly our children, learn to read and read to learn so they too can do everything.”

This essence of this resolution is summarized well throughout this report by Dr. Moats¹, a respected teacher, psychologist, researcher, and professor who has been at the forefront of literacy research for five decades.

“This report is an update to the original Teaching Reading Is Rocket Science published by the American Federation of Teachers over 20 years ago and emerges from a collaboration between the AFT and the Center for Development and Learning. Together they acknowledge that, although some progress has been made in teaching reading effectively, too few at-risk, disadvantaged, and minority students become proficient readers. Insufficient emphasis has been placed on understanding the science of reading, which, when appropriately implemented, can enable these students to make significant reading and writing gains.” (pg. 4)

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a congressionally mandated program initiated in 1969, provides student achievement data from across our nation.

California’s 2022 NAEP score shows only 31% of California 4th graders perform at or above the proficient level in reading. Poor reading instruction by California’s education system continues to perpetuate inequalities that have had a greater impact on at-risk, disadvantaged, and minority students. Of concern, studies show when the literacy gaps widen, also known as the Matthew effect, the inequalities become exponentially greater, as each year passes. Importantly, Dr. Moats indicates:

“Persistent “gaps” between more advantaged and less advantaged students can be narrowed and even closed. Fundamentally, these gaps are the result of differences in students’ opportunities to learn—not their learning abilities.”

NAEP allows us to compare states, including Mississippi, which passed statewide legislation in 2013 implementing early screening, teacher training, and evidence-based reading curricula. The NAEP data below shows Mississippi’s legislative action has proven successful for their students:

- 2013 – Mississippi below 49th
- 2017 – Mississippi just below 44th
- 2019 – Mississippi just below 29th
- 2022 – Mississippi tied at 21st

To quote State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond who spoke at the 2022 California Reading Summit, “If evidence-based programs are not mandated the school districts

will not do it.” This is a social justice issue and a matter of equity. We ask the California State PTA to pass this resolution to support equitable access to literacy for all students.