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International Reading Association

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Making a Difference Means Making It Different:

Honoring Children's Rights to Excellent Reading Instruction

The following press release was issued by the International Reading Association on Jan. 10 at the National Press Club.

NEWARK, Delaware – “In spite of reform movements over the last 30 years, some American children are not reading and writing well,” says Carol Santa, president of the International Reading Association. “While reform movements have been powerful in identifying problems and in changing the focus from providing children with equal resources to providing children with effective instruction, the results of these efforts have been disappointing. It is time to refocus educational reform on the rights of the child to have the best possible instruction.

“Too often educational reform has taken a narrow focus which overly simplifies the situation. Solutions cannot be based on one part of the reading equation. All children don't fit the same mold,” she continues. “Policy makers and educators must adopt a set of broad principles based on the rights of children to effective reading instruction. We must work to insure that these rights become part of educational policy, school curriculum and accountability.”

Today, the International Reading Association released a statement “Making a Difference Means Making It Different: Honoring Children's Rights to Excellent Reading Instruction,” outlining a fundamental change in how policy makers, parents, and school professionals must look at improving schools. The new International Reading Association position statement asserts that it is time to build reading programs based on the rights

of every child to receive effective instruction in reading. These rights are:

1. Children have a right to appropriate early reading instruction based on their individual needs. No single method or single combination of methods can successfully teach all children to read.

2. Children have a right to reading instruction that builds both skill and the desire to read increasingly complex materials. Children need well-developed repertoires of reading comprehension and study strategies.

3. Children have a right to well-prepared teachers who keep their skills up to date through effective professional development. Teachers skilled in the wide range of methods for teaching reading must be at the core of all reform efforts.

4. Children have a right to access a wide variety of books and other reading material in classroom, school, and community libraries. Children who do a substantial amount of voluntary reading are positive about reading and are good readers.

5. Children have the right to reading assessment that identifies their strengths as well as their needs and involves them in making decisions about their own learning. Assessments must provide information for instructional decision-making as well as for public accountability.

6. Children who are struggling as learners have a right to receive supplemental instruction from professionals specifically prepared to teach reading. No school can provide adequate reading and writing instruction for all children without the specific expertise in reading offered by specialists.

7. Children have a right to reading instruction that involves parents and communities in their academic lives. Ensuring that all children learn to read and write requires the cooperation of a wide group of stakeholders. It takes the whole community to teach all children to read and write.

8. Children have a right to reading instruction that makes skilled use of their first language skills. Initial literacy instruction should be provided in a child's native language whenever possible. Policies on initial instruction should support the professional judgment of teachers without federal, state, or local mandates.

9. Children have the right to equal access to technology used for the improvement of reading instruction. Much needs to be done in the area of technology. Schools, teacher education

institutions, professional development providers, and researchers at all levels must be encouraged and supported as they devote more energy and resources to this area.

10. Children have a right to classrooms that optimize learning opportunities. If we are serious about improving reading achievement we must be held accountable for providing appropriate student-teacher ratios, certified teachers, discipline supported by families and the community, and buildings in sound physical condition.

"Research has shown that the needs of children will be much different in ten years," Santa summarizes. "For members of the International Reading Association, the choice is clear: we must reach all children with excellent reading instruction. This set of children's rights has the basis to build and support programs that work. It is time to make the change from one-stop planning to building programs to meet every child's need."

For further information on the International Reading Association's position statement, "Making a Difference Means Making It Different: Honoring Children's Rights to Excellent Reading Instruction," visit the Research and Advocacy sections of the International Reading Association's Web site at www.reading.org

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