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Foreward

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Foreward



PREFACE BY **P. DAVID PEARSON**

This volume is a testimony to achieving the improbable, for it documents the sort of professional collaboration that many of us imagine but few of us achieve. The articles in this volume demonstrate that reading teachers and English teachers share a common vision of the language arts as well as common tools for implementing that vision. The fact that so many teachers have so much to say about a document published by a state agency is evidence of an even rarer collaboration — a state educational agency working hand-in-hand with professional organizations and schools. Something rare, something important, has happened in Michigan as we approach the turn of the century — several traditionally separate communities (teachers in local school sites, professional organizations like the Michigan Reading Association and the Michigan Council of Teachers of English, university scholars, and state policymakers) have banded together to create and support a grass-roots movement toward reform in the English language arts. This movement is guided by what can only be characterized as a heretical document — a state curriculum framework that actually stands a chance of being used.

Why does this framework stand a chance of being used? After all, our expectation for curriculum documents is that they serve as closeted dust collectors in our schools. Its utility derives from the content it entails and the process that gave it life. The ideas it

contains are as well-grounded in theory and research about the nature of learning the English language arts as they are in exemplary practice in teaching the language arts. This is one source of its power and credibility. Professionals examine it and say, "They're right! That's the way it is." Equally important in establishing the credibility of the framework is the process that the language arts community used to develop it. This is no ivory tower or back room effort. Classroom teachers, language arts scholars, administrators, and parents were involved at every step along the way.

The framework possesses one other absolutely critical quality: It is written at the optimal level of generality — specific enough not to flounder in very general, and thereby hopelessly vague, statements about the importance of learning to read and write, yet not so specific as to thwart the attempts of districts and schools to build local documents that bear the signature of local effort and, therefore, the power of local ownership.

That teachers are able to write about the process of implementing the framework in their schools and classrooms is strong evidence that it does what it was intended to do, indeed what any set of common standards ought to do — create an occasion for grand-scale professional and public conversations about what we want our schools to do for our children. This volume is a wonderful way to open that conversation.