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UP-DATE ON READING Michigan Department of Education

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In the fall of the year, a lot of people like to know about the status of the various Departmental reading programs, so in this article, I'll try to supply interested readers with some current information.

Reading Support Services: First, about Reading Support (Section 43). As you know, any district that does not receive Chapter 3 funds (this year known as Article 3) is eligible to receive Section 43 funds. Funded again this year at a two million dollar level, the point of the program is to encourage local and intermediate school districts to hire reading specialists to work as support persons to the district's over-all reading effort. The idea is, if reading support specialists can help to improve the **general** reading program, there will be less need eventually for **special** reading programs. The Reading Support teacher may do this by working as a consultant with groups of teachers, individual teachers, and/or with aides and paraprofessionals. He or she may conduct inservice sessions in reading and work either at the elementary or secondary level, or both. The Reading Support teacher may also provide direct services to students.

Two years ago - for the first time - a list of Section 43 districts making above average reading gains (for the 1974-75 program) was published. Such a list has been compiled for each of the succeeding years. This year's evaluation report, still uncompleted, will probably go to the State Board in December or January, and after that will be generally available. At present the Department's research staff is making an attempt to relate the evaluation data submitted by the districts to State Assessment data, to see if support services seem to lead to significant reading gains.

As of this writing (October 14), the application forms have not been sent out. But we hope they will be shortly. We're still not completely satisfied with our means of evaluating the program, and some questions regarding this year's evalu-

ation design need to be resolved before we send out the application forms. What we'd like to eventually be able to do is find a way of determining which of the various approaches used by Reading Support personnel seem to have the greatest impact on students.

The Paperback Program: Section 25 of the Department Budget Bill this year allocates \$550,000.00 to the Department to distribute to local districts for the purchase of high-interest paperback books. (Last year's appropriation was \$400,000.) All schools are eligible, and applications went out to all superintendents on October 6, 1977. They're due back October 31. Local districts must match one-third of the amount they receive from the state. Last year, 500 districts took part in the program.

The evidence seems to be that when you saturate a building with attractive, high-interest paperback books and locate them in places in the school conducive to informal browsing and reading, reluctant readers do begin to pick these books up and, lo and behold, even read them. Assuming that motivating youngsters to want to read is just about as important as teaching them to read, I personally feel this program is making a real contribution to the state's reading effort.

As a matter of fact, Michigan's experimental paperback program has been viewed as so successful, the U.S. Office of Education is now considering undertaking a similar kind of effort.

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF):

Another motivational reading program comes out of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. The idea for the program is that if kids get to keep the paperback books of their choice, and if there are a lot of motivational activities that lead up to the actual book give-aways (which occur about five times a year), children may become more interested in books and reading. If your district gets involved in RIF, the federal government will pay half of your book bill - the other half must be paid through local funds (usually

raised eagerly through service organizations and volunteer groups).

The program depends heavily on volunteers, and it's generally agreed by those in the program to be great fun and really worthwhile. If you're interested (and I think you should be), write to Curtis Brown, Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) Smithsonian Institution, L'Enfant 2500, Washington, D.C., 20560.

Right to Read: Letters went out to superintendents and Right to Read people about this year's training program in September. A sixteen-day training program, conducted by Judy Hood, of the Right to Read staff, will be held in eight two-day segments in Lansing. Two four-day mini-training sessions will be held, one in Grayling (conducted by Dick Ross of Intermediate District) and one in Lansing (conducted by Teresa Staten of our Right to Read Staff). In both cases, two of the days will be held in the fall, and two in the spring. Shirley Goodman will also be conducting a workshop for Middle Cities personnel, and Barbara Burke for the Detroit Right to Readers. We're also planning a January conference. Very soon after the letters announcing all of these went out, the various sessions began filling up. People seem to feel the various training sessions are really worthwhile.

We're trying very hard to evaluate the training program. As a matter of fact, a pilot evaluation effort suggests at least tentatively that a rather high proportion of Right to Read buildings made significant gains in reading over a three-year period of time, as indicated by State Assessment data.

Gifted and Talented Students: My guess at this time is that Section 47 funds probably will be available to districts again this year for pilot programs for the gifted and talented. However, since relatively few districts end up getting these moneys (last year, 90 applications were received, but we had money enough to fund only six), it seems to me if a district wants to better provide for this group of students, it seems wise to think how to do it through local and existing funds.

Personally, I feel one of the most appropriate ways to provide for these kids is through reading programs. In other words, identify those students who are reading well above grade level and plan, on the basis of what we know about how

these kids best learn, reading instruction that is most appropriate for them. I think inevitably the most appropriate objectives for these students will be in the critical reading and creative reading categories.

Sister Marie Collette Roy found that when she identified about 80 gifted youngsters in the Milwaukee area who were in the main reading below grade level, that the major problem seemed to be that these children had become so bored and turned off by the heavy doses of word attack skills they were receiving that they eventually turned off from reading completely. Usually, of course, academically talented students are very good readers. And in this case, they need reading instruction geared to their advanced abilities and interests.

Reading Objectives: Too complicated a subject to deal with briefly. But let me say at least that after about two years of work, we have a new draft of the reading objectives (and the writing objectives and the speaking/listening objectives); and these objectives are now being used as a basis for assessment-item development. In developing ways to assess these objectives, we'll undoubtedly continue to edit and refine them. We tried in the whole procedure to base the objectives on the MRA-Department definition of reading, which stresses reading comprehension. The assessment procedure being developed this year will not be limited to paper-and-pencil test items, but the item developers - teachers who are employed in local districts - will develop a variety of assessment techniques, including teacher observation procedures.

Over-all Departmental Reading Effort: There are at least twelve to fifteen separate reading programs in the Department, and these programs are located in various service areas and are funded under a variety of state and federal funds. A great deal of effort is being made to re-examine these various programs to relate them more closely to each other. Under development is a state position on reading, which will be based on the definition of reading the MRA assisted the Department with (see the Spring, 1977, *MRA Journal*). It will be expected, then, that all the discrete state reading programs will relate directly to that over-all position on reading.