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Dean's Corner: Focus on Literacy

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Focus on Literacy

On behalf of Grand Valley State University's College of Education, welcome to our 2016 *Colleagues* magazine special feature issue on literacy. We are publishing this to highlight one of today's most critical issues in K-12 education. Literacy is such a high priority for the future of the state that Michigan's governor, Rick Snyder, created the Third-Grade Workgroup to analyze Michigan's reading proficiency at the third-grade level, and to suggest policies to improve reading proficiency across Michigan.

This bold action was the result of many factors. One being the 2013 report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which stated that 69% of Michigan students are not proficient in reading at the beginning of fourth grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). In addition, when Michigan students are compared to students from other states, Michigan ranks 40th and continues to fall behind. In fact, Michigan was one of only five states to lose ground in reading proficiency from 2003-2013, while every other state improved (Third-Grade Reading Workgroup Report, 2015).

Although these standardized assessments represent a snapshot of student reading achievement, they reveal critical information that warrants consideration as we address the literacy needs of all students as a united community, specifically when given the strong connection between third-grade literacy and high school graduation (National Governors Association, 2013). It is essential that we respond to these challenges by using our collective exper-



Dr. John Shinsky meets with the new dean of the COE, Dr. Barry Kanpol.

Photography by Joanna Allerhand

tise to improve children's reading proficiency. To begin a broader discussion, in this issue of *Colleagues* magazine you will find stories about teaching strategies across a spectrum of literacy education topics.

At this time I would like to introduce you to our new Dean of the College of Education, Dr. Barry Kanpol. He joins us from Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne and starts here in July.

Dr. Kanpol received a bachelor's degree in English literature in 1981 from Tel Aviv University. He taught in Israeli Public Schools before immigrating to the U.S. in 1983. He received his master's and doctoral degrees from The Ohio State University in 1984 and 1987, respectively. His academic work addresses issues of race, class and gender and he has written and presented extensively in the areas of federal educational policies and reforms, multicultural education, urban education and the role of popular culture.

I look forward to working with Dean Kanpol as we continue to address the challenging issues facing education in our region and throughout the state. Under his leadership, the COE will further expand its role and commitment to ensure every child in Michigan receives a quality education from well-trained teachers and administrators.

E. John Shinsky, Ph.D.
Interim Dean, College of Education