

Make a Commitment to the Success of All Children
by Scott DiMauro

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If you've ever shared a book with a child, you know the joy and excitement this small but meaningful act can bring. But did you know that, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, only 53 percent of children ages three to five were read to daily by a family member?

Reading is a skill that must be taught, supported, and sustained. Supporting children's reading activities--even simply reading daily with a child--requires substantial commitment from parents, older brothers and sisters, and other caring adults. The effort may be great, but so are the rewards:

- Children who are read to at home have a higher success rate in school.
- Children who read frequently develop stronger reading skills, and those skills translate into success in every subject area throughout a child's education.

As a high school teacher, I know that my students who have strong reading skills have a clear advantage in understanding the complex concepts of history, geography, economics and government that form the core of our social studies curriculum. Those foundational reading skills are established many years before I see my students in class. That's why programs such as Worthington's Kindergarten-Plus option hold such promise for long-term success.

To encourage more adults to spend more time reading with children, the National Education Association launched the first Read Across America day in 1998. Next week, NEA's Read Across America will mark six years of celebrating reading on Dr. Seuss' birthday, March 3, 2003.

In this community, the 800-member Worthington Education Association is marking the celebration in several ways. First, the parents of each incoming kindergarten student who participated in last week's registration received a guide to reading with young children. This Parent's Guide includes a variety of specific hands-on strategies for turning children on to the love of reading. (You can get your copy by calling the WEA office at 883-3058.)

In addition, we are once again collecting new preschool books for the Children's Hospital *Reach Out and Read* program. Every child up to the age of five who visits a Children's Hospital clinic is given a new book by the attending physician as a way of promoting early literacy throughout the Columbus area.

Finally, we are once again hosting members of the community, including Congressman Pat Tiberi, members of our school board and central office administration, and other friends of public education as guest readers in dozens of elementary classrooms this week.

Please join us--and millions of children, parents, educators, and business leaders across the country--in celebrating NEA's Read Across America this year. Read to a child March 3, and make a commitment to ensure that all children are given a foundation that enables them to enter school ready to learn. That requires a commitment by public policy-makers at the national, state and local level to provide the resources necessary to make this happen. It also requires your commitment to lay the foundation for success through your efforts in your own family and throughout the community. Working together, we'll help *all* our children succeed.

Scott DiMauro is a high school social studies teacher who currently serves as president of the Worthington Education Association.