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A Message from the MRA President

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A Message from MRA President William J. Devers III, Ph.D.

Several weeks ago, with the stroke of a pen, President Bush created the Institute of Educational Sciences, a recently established agency to oversee federally funded research in education. The new agency replaces the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), which formally was responsible for such research projects. This agency is a part of the Educational Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (ESRA).

At the signing of the act, President Bush commented, "This act will substantially strengthen the scientific basis for the Department of Education's continuing efforts to help families, schools, and state and local governments with the education of America's children."

The language in the ESRA is parallel to the language found in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as it relates to federally funded research. The law states that research financed by the Institute of Educational Sciences should be "scientifically valid." It is a confirmation of the federal government's intention to apply the gold standard for experimental research before accepting the results as educationally valid. So, what does this mean to Michigan educators?

In the short-term, it does not mean much. Michigan educators will continue to teach to the best of their abilities and research studies that are currently under way will progress. Long term, the affects of NCLB and ESRA cannot be underestimated. Future federally funded research projects must conform to the "scientifically valid" language in both acts. This will mean that almost all research will need to be experimental in design for the results to pass the gold standard. For researchers, it means that correlational studies, case studies, and a variety of other research designs that have provided valuable infor-

mation in the past will no longer be funded. That could easily impact the flow of research monies that Michigan's colleges and universities receive.



Devers

A glimpse of what is to come in Michigan's classrooms can be viewed during the Reading First initiative rollout for our lowest performing schools. These schools will receive a prescribed staff development program concerning one particular beginning reading program for their early elementary staff as well as money for the teachers to purchase specified materials to support the staff development activities. In addition to the staff development,

teachers will be expected to follow scripted teaching materials and follow specified time allocations during their language arts block.

After the Reading First schools are under way, all early elementary teachers will receive the same prescribed training and will most probably be expected to use the same scripted materials during their language arts period of time. What worries me about the new legislation is that it is a federal program that will dramatically affect local school districts and how they make decisions about their own local curriculum. The legislation suggests that this federal program will wrap itself around local districts squeezing out local control.

Of what importance is this to the Michigan Reading Journal? With the impending shift in federal research funding rules, professional journals such as this one will become an even more important vehicle for educators to publish their inquiry and strategies. The Michigan Reading Journal is a very important part of our organization. It provides a forum for any member to present his or her views, ideas, or research. I encourage you to lend your voice.