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Michigan Reading Association Position Statement: A Model of a Comprehensive Reading Program at the Secondary Level

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MICHIGAN READING ASSOCIATION POSITION STATEMENT

A Model of a Comprehensive Reading Program at the Secondary Level

One goal of schools is to foster literacy, because literacy enables students to function constructively in society by participating as knowledgeable decision-makers and independent learners. But many Americans believe that secondary schools have failed in this endeavor. This is evidenced by the continued attention focused by the popular press and academic journals on the decline of academic standards. While there is no one single cause given for this decline, some of the more frequently mentioned reasons are: decline of the family, decline in the quality of teaching, growth of an anti-intellectual "youth culture," minimized role of reading, and insubordinate youth. While it is not the purpose of this paper to focus on all these issues, what is of importance to the Michigan Reading Association is the minimized role of reading at the secondary level. We believe that this is largely the result of how reading has been conceptualized at this level.

Historically, reading programs at the secondary level have had a remedial focus that emphasized the improvement of specific skills not mastered previously by "poor readers," and/or a developmental focus that provided opportunities for increasing speed, expanding vocabulary, and refining study skills for the more proficient reader. This myopic perspective has perpetuated an elementary concept of reading, one in which mastery of basic reading skills is assumed to occur by the end of sixth grade. The consequence of this view is readily apparent. In most middle, junior, or

senior high schools only a few highly trained reading teachers or a minority of content teachers may, on occasion, infuse reading skills into their classes. As such limited practices suggest, there is currently no systematic or comprehensive approach that seeks to juxtapose content and process. As a result, reading in many instances is circumvented. For this reason, the Michigan Reading Association believes a more comprehensive model is needed.

THE COMPREHENSIVE MODEL

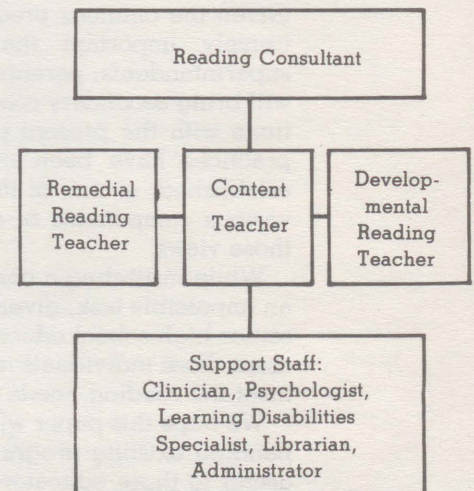
The Comprehensive Model is predicated on the following precepts:

1. Reading must be conceptualized as a process and, as such, there must be provisions for the systematic development and application of content-related reading skills across all content areas.
2. The program must consist of a number of instructional components, e.g., developmental, remedial, and content, that address the various reading needs that exist at the secondary level.
3. Content teachers must not abdicate their responsibilities for teaching content-related reading skills to the reading specialist or English teachers assigned to teach reading because this results in reading operating as an isolated segment in the secondary curriculum.
4. Teachers in all content fields must assume responsibility for

teaching content-related reading skills to ensure that proper transfer and reinforcement occur.

A comprehensive reading program (See figure 1 below¹) is comprised of a number of essential components: (1) the content teacher, (2) the reading consultant, (3) the developmental teacher, (4) the remedial reading specialists, and (5) the support staff.

Figure 1
Model of a Comprehensive Reading
Program at the Secondary Level



As Figure 1 suggests, the **first component** is the **content teacher**. This person is the focal point of the comprehensive program for the following reasons: (1) a major portion of the secondary students come in contact with several content teachers during the school day; (2) content teachers disseminate a significant amount of information via the printed page; therefore, con-

1. The figure is taken from Peters, C.W. How to get a more comprehensive reading program. *Journal of Reading*, 1977, 20, 513-519.

tent teachers must: (a) be knowledgeable about the specific content-related skills students need to comprehend and use such information, (b) infuse these content-related skills systematically into their materials, and (c) guide students in the use and application of these content-related skills; (3) if the other components of the comprehensive reading program are to function properly, there must be continuous and meaningful communication among the remedial reading specialist, developmental reading teacher, the consultant, and the content teachers. Without the content teachers becoming actively involved, reading at the secondary level can only be fragmented at best. In addition, content teachers should possess the qualifications outlined in the "Compliance With New Teacher Certification Reading Requirements" published by the Michigan Department of Education.²

The **second component** of the model is the **reading consultant**. In the context of this model, the reading consultant's major functions are: (1) to work with teachers, administrators, and other support staff in developing techniques and strategies for infusing reading skills into content classrooms; (2) to establish and maintain communication between and among other components of the program; (3) to assess and evaluate the reading program, and (4) to evaluate curricular materials. In addition, the reading consultant should possess the qualifications as stated in the International Reading Association Guidelines (Role 4) and Michigan Department of Education Standards (Role 11).³

The third **component** of the model is the **developmental** reading teacher. The major responsibility of this person is to teach reading study-related skills to the "average" and accelerated students, i.e., to all students except those who are classified as disabled. The

developmental reading teacher should not be viewed as a person who will assume the responsibilities of content teachers for incorporating reading skills into their content areas; rather, it is imperative that the two work closely together to reinforce mutually the essential content-related reading skills. In addition, the developmental reading teacher should possess the qualifications as stated in the International Reading Association Guidelines (Role 2) and Michigan Department of Education Standards (Role 11).

The **fourth component** of the model is the **remedial reading teacher**. The major responsibility of this person is to work with those students who have specific skill deficiencies that result in inadequate comprehension of content materials. Special assistance for overcoming these deficiencies should be provided by the remedial reading teacher. Consequently, it is essential that the remedial reading teacher and the content teachers understand the specific responsibilities of each component and how each can assist the other in the attainment of related curricular and educational goals. In addition, the remedial reading teacher should possess the qualifications as stated in the International Reading Association Guidelines (Role 3) and the Michigan Department of Education Standards (Role 11).

The **fifth component** of the model is the **support staff**, i.e., the educational psychologist, the learning disabilities specialist, clinical, personnel, counselors, librarian, learning resource center teachers, and administrators. They provide ancillary services that are essential to the success of any reading program, and they must work closely with the other components of the program to develop mutually agreed upon roles, responsibilities, and goals.

These five components of a comprehensive secondary reading pro-

gram must be interrelated. Although the responsibilities of each individual are not static and may change as the program evolves, the delineation of responsibilities and the interrelationships of the various components provides a conceptual framework that ensures smooth implementation.

REFERENCES

International reading association guidelines for the professional preparation of reading teachers, 1978.

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Prepared by the Secondary Reading committee, a sub-committee of the Professional Studies and Standards Committee.

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2. "Compliance With New Teacher Certification Reading Requirements," the document referenced above, can be obtained from the Michigan Department of Education, Teacher Preparation and Certification Services, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing, MI 48909.

3. The International Reading Association's Guidelines can be obtained by writing the International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Rd., Newark, Delaware 19711. The Michigan Department of Education Standards can be obtained by writing the Teacher Preparation and Certification Services, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing, MI 48909.