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Attitude Of Michigan Residents Toward Reading

Betty Childs
President, Michigan Reading Association

The Public in Michigan is behind the "Right to Read Effort" according to a recent survey commissioned by the Michigan Reading Association and Michigan Intermediate Reading Association.

In June the Market Opinion Research polled 800 Michigan residents by telephone in order to determine public reaction to three areas related to reading instruction. The areas were continued funding, priority of emphasis on reading, and satisfaction with reading instruction. The question related to funding was:

In the past, the State Aid Act has provided that special money be available to school districts for reading. Do you think the State should continue to provide these funds?

84% replied YES

9% replied NO

7% replied DON'T KNOW

A year and a half ago Governor William Milliken signed an executive declaration marking the '70's as the "Right to Read Decade." The goal set in the declaration was literacy for 99% of those under age 16 and 90% for those over age 16 by 1980.

A month later, the Michigan Legislature passed a resolution recognizing and encouraging the Michigan "Right to Read Effort." The Legislature that year appropriated 4 million dollars for Reading Support Service. This year the appropriation was cut to 2 million dollars. Dr. Charles Peters, Chairman of the MRA Legislative Committee, reports that their objective is to reinstate the State Aid Act for Reading Support to 4 million dollars for 1977-78.

Reading Support Services adequately funded and effectively administered strengthens the local reading program

by providing for consultation for teachers, remediation for students, and clinical services for students with severe reading problems.

Lately, there has been a great deal of interest in the "Back to Basics Movement." The question related to emphasis on reading was:

Do you think Michigan State Government should or should not continue to place a high priority on the mastery of reading as a basic skill for all students?

87% SHOULD CONTINUE

3% SHOULD NOT CONTINUE

10% DON'T KNOW

With emphasis on reading the largest portion of the elementary school day should be allocated to reading. We can not have a balanced curriculum and provide adequate instructional time for reading instruction. Over the years many areas have been added to the elementary curriculum. In addition to the 3 R's, reading, writing, arithmetic, there is spelling, science, social studies, language, art, music, physical education, health, career education, value clarification and global education. Many subjects have been added to the elementary curriculum but few are eliminated. As each new area is added it reduces the time spent in other areas. This survey indicates the public **supports reading as a high priority and the mastery of reading as a basic skill.**

The third question dealt with satisfaction of reading instruction. It was stated:

Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the reading instruction that children are now receiving in Michigan Schools?

Why are you satisfied or dissatisfied?

27% SATISFIED
34% DISSATISFIED
39% DON'T KNOW

Of the twenty-seven per cent who expressed satisfaction with the current reading instruction, forty per cent reported that their own children or the children they know are doing well. One fourth praised schools or the programs in the school. Nineteen per cent based their approval on improvement in materials, individualization, increased appeal of the reading courses, and special reading classes.

The one-third dissatisfied used general terms such as, "They are not taught to read," "The instruction is

poor", or, "There's not enough emphasis on reading courses." This survey indicates that the public approves of the emphasis on reading instruction and funding of Reading Support Services. Not only must a priority be placed on reading instruction but also an emphasis must be placed on pre-service and inservice programs to develop teacher competency in reading.

This year the MRA committee on Professional Studies and Standards, chaired by James Alexander, is working with Teresa Staten from MDE to develop a Comprehensive Reading Design for the State of Michigan. The criteria from the "Right to Read Effort" will be used.

INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION

for educators concerned about reading.

A nonprofit association of 70,000 members, IRA has programs designed to fit the needs of every educator involved in reading instruction. *Journals:* The Reading Teacher, Journal of Reading, Reading Research Quarterly. *Conventions:* Approximately 12,000 persons are expected May 2-6, 1977, in Miami Beach, Florida. *Affiliates:* There are more than 930 affiliates in almost every state and province of the United States and Canada and 22 nations. *Publications:* IRA offers more than 130 individual publications, including from 10 to 15 new publications each year. If you want to know more, write: International Reading Association, 800 Barksdale Road, Newark, Delaware 19711, U.S.A.