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PROMISES, PROGRAMS, AND POLITICS

The bright promise of governmental concern for and support of improved reading instruction for children in Michigan schools seems to be dimming. Last year's "State Aid for Remedial Reading Programs Act", commonly known as "Section 12", was regarded by reading teachers as the first of several vital steps toward providing each student at every grade level with appropriate services, instruction, and materials to enable him to realize his potential in acquiring reading skill. To be sure, there were those who would have preferred to emphasize developmental reading rather than remedial, and there was a concern on the part of many that the requirements for reading staff members were too lenient to be meaningful. Nevertheless, the state program was a beginning, a recognition of a problem which could be solved if the necessary resources were allocated to it. Fiscal reform, i.e., a state income tax, appeared to be the only possible route to the funds for reading and other imperative educational programs.

As everyone who received a paycheck in October knows, the state income tax is a reality. Money for reading programs, however, is not. At last report, funds for the state reimbursable program had been cut to only 40 percent of the 1966-67 appropriation. Some districts which had planned improvements in reading instruction were forced to cancel them; some which had already employed additional reading teachers found it necessary to return them to regular classrooms. Some teachers who are taking advanced graduate courses in reading to qualify as reading specialists have begun to question whether they should continue if the state's support is going to fade away.

The Michigan Reading Association is directly involved in this issue through its Professional Standards Committee. The group, which began meeting during the summer to establish standards for reading specialists, is chaired by Beverly Chamberlain, Jackson County Intermediate School District. Other members are Jessie Blank, Washtenaw County; Pierce McCleod, Macomb County; Jean Hamilton, Wayne State University, and Dorothy Smith, Western Michigan University.

It is the recommendation of the Professional Standards Committee that individual members of the Michigan Reading Association write to their legislators to protest the cut in funds, a recommendation which we strongly endorse. To do any less than this is to abdicate our professional responsibilities to our present and future pupils.

Charles F. Sherwood