



Friday, February 22, 2008

Iris Salters: Labor Voices

Reading skills remain basis of success



Visualize this: In 2 read 2day

When I started teaching, I never dreamed that I'd have to remind students not to use shorthand like that to write, "Learn to read today." But technology such as text messaging and chatting online has created new challenges for teachers and parents, especially when it comes to encouraging children's reading and writing skills and preparing them for future jobs. New technology will keep coming. But regardless of how we communicate today -- or 10 years from now -- basic reading skills will continue to be the foundation for student success in school and in the workplace.

Books are still the key to developing reading proficiency. The teacher is the most valuable resource in the classroom, and when you equip that teacher with up-to-date textbooks, the combination is unbeatable.

Yet we have situations, such as in the Pontiac schools, where some students don't even have textbooks in their elementary science classes. Students without solid reading skills or the necessary textbooks to develop those skills and knowledge base will be at a serious disadvantage -- not only in school but also in the workplace, limiting their choices of jobs and income.

Use technology to reach kids

In our classrooms, it's clear that we need to continue to foster both a love of and a talent for reading. But we also need to meet students where they are; and while many of us may find new technology intimidating, it's the key to reaching today's students.

The explosion of information available online has heightened the need for students to develop high-level reading skills. Just do a Google search. Sorting through the thousands of results, you realize the value of having strong reading skills that allow you to draw connections between pieces of information or to apply meaning to words or to make judgments about accuracy and importance.

Organizations like the Michigan Virtual University and the Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning are striving to help educators use technology and integrate it into the curriculum. School districts and the state should do everything they can to assist teachers in incorporating new technology as classroom tools that help build proficiency.

Outside the classroom, parents who make reading an important part of a child's daily life are having a huge impact. I encourage parents to keep a variety of books and reading material around the house. Make it a point to have your children see you reading. And spend at least 20 minutes each day reading to your children or having them read to you. Working together, parents and teachers can help Michigan's children be great readers and great future workers.

While reading is a yearlong priority, with the National Education Association's Read Across America on March 3 and March being "Reading Month," now is a great time to renew the focus to promote this critical skill. Nothing sparks the imagination more than reading. Not only will reading set the groundwork for a child's academic and future economic success, it will unlock the creativity needed to imagine the new technologies, the possibilities and the careers that we can only dream -- or read -- about today.

Iris Salters is president of the Michigan Education Association, a union that represents teachers and education support staff. Fax comments to (313) 222-6417 or e-mail them to letters@detnews.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080222/OPINION03/802220313>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© Copyright 2008 The Detroit News. All rights reserved.