



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

National Reading Achievement Goals Inform Early Literacy Instruction

*The much anticipated National Early Literacy Panel report *Developing Early Literacy* identifies research-based literacy best practices, provides clues for unlocking life-long learning, and underscores the need for translational research to address the gap in our nation's understanding of literacy.*

WASHINGTON, January 8, 2009 — Learning to read and write opens doors to progress and prosperity across a lifetime. The years before kindergarten are a particularly fertile and profitable time to prepare young children to read and learn by teaching them essential literacy skills. The challenge of helping all children become successful readers requires early teaching, using home and school instruction built upon proven research and effective practices.

This is the message being delivered today as the National Institute for Literacy (the Institute) releases findings from the much-anticipated report, *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel, A Scientific Synthesis of Early Literacy Development and Implications for Intervention*. The National Early Literacy Panel's (NELP) report serves as the basis of several powerful, research-based recommendations to the early childhood community – educators, caregivers, Head Start providers, and parents – on promoting the foundational skills of life-long literacy.

“Literacy skills start developing the moment we’re born and it is literacy that enables a person’s ability to participate in society. This new report shows the scientific validity of earlier and more targeted investments in literacy development,” said NELP chairman Dr. Timothy Shanahan, a professor of urban education at the University of Illinois at Chicago and director of its Center for Literacy.

Some of the key findings of the report reveal the best early predictors of literacy, which include alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness, rapid naming skills, writing (such as writing one’s name), and short-term memory for words said aloud. Instruction on these skills may be especially helpful for children at risk for developing reading difficulties. More complex oral language skills also appear to be important.

“These are very important findings,” Dr. Shanahan added. “We can use the report to shape educational policy and practice, determine how teachers and families can best support young children’s development, and guide future literacy research initiatives. This is the most comprehensive synthesis of published literacy research ever conducted by scientists on children from birth to age 5, and it provides an important basis for actionable recommendations.”

In addition to presenting findings on which early measures of a child’s skills predict later decoding, reading comprehension, and spelling achievement, *Developing Early Literacy* identifies a wide-variety of interventions and instructional approaches that improve a child’s early literacy skills. NELP researchers also looked at the role of environment and at child characteristics that may link to future outcomes in reading, writing, and spelling.

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2-2-2-NELP Report

Said Shanahan: “We have accomplished a major goal by synthesizing the scientific evidence to better understand what matters when the youngest of children are developing literacy skills. This report provides clear evidence that early literacy interventions work. However, we need more investment and research from government, business, philanthropy, and academia to continue to build and strengthen the connection between scientific evidence and strategies used in classrooms, early learning centers, and at home to make children better readers and learners.”

The Institute convened the nine-member National Early Literacy Panel in 2002 in consultation with The National Center for Family Literacy, and was supported by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. *Developing Early Literacy* bridges a large gap in the early-literacy research knowledge base. By synthesizing research on language, literacy, and communication, the report clearly identifies which critical early skills or abilities and proven instructional practices are precursors of later literacy achievement. It provides important clues and insights into emergent literacy from birth through age 5 and points the way for future literacy research and scientific inquiry.

Daniel J. Miller, Acting Director of the Institute, complimented the work of the National Early Literacy Panel saying, “This report, a culmination of a systematic, meta-analytic review of the entire body of research on early literacy, not only provides us with clues into fostering life-long learners, but also clearly indicates the need for translational research that turns theory into best practices. *Developing Early Literacy* will help us close the gaps that have existed in literacy practices in the formative years.”

Laura Westberg, the report’s Principal Investigator and Director of Special Projects and Research for the National Center for Family Literacy, joined Miller in praising the panel, adding, “We can now build on these findings to create meaningful tools and materials to engage and support parents, families, and communities. We can also encourage research-based changes in teacher training, curriculum development, and assessment.”

The National Institute for Literacy, a federal agency, provides leadership on literacy issues, including the improvement of reading instruction for children, youth and adults.

A copy of *Developing Early Literacy*, and related NELP information and products, can be found at www.nifl.gov.

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