



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

"FY 2006 – 2007: REFLECTING ON OUR ACHIEVEMENTS"

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TO
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October 1, 2007 marked the beginning of a new fiscal year for the Institute. As I think ahead to the work the staff and I will perform over the next 12 months, I realize that much of our future work builds on the Institute's past accomplishments. The work of the past year, indeed the Institute's work since its inception, has provided and continues to provide a strong foundation for our current efforts to be the national leader on literacy issues, strengthen practice through the application of evidence-based instructional techniques, and build a more robust knowledge base by promoting and supporting scientifically-based and other rigorous research on how adults, youth, and children learn to read—literacy across the lifespan. As we have sought and used innovative approaches to help us successfully meet the challenges of an expanded agency mission—from focusing solely on adult education to making meaningful contributions to literacy issues across the lifespan, we have found that the principles used to shape the Institute's first decade of work are still important and relevant, even as we accept new challenges and adopt new strategies for increasing our efficacy.

The juncture between ending the old year and beginning a new one seems the perfect time to reflect on past achievements and plan new contributions. It is also the perfect time to think about the principles and underlying values that should shape not only plans for the future, but the strategy for achieving those plans. With that in mind, I am writing a different kind of report for you this time. While I will highlight the Institute's accomplishments of the past year, I will also highlight some of the activities planned for 2007-2008. I hope that you will find this report useful in informing the very important decisions we need to make in the next several months as we complete work on the Institute's strategic plan, finalize our spending plans for the current year, and determine the future contributions we must make to fulfill our legislative mandate and advance the field of literacy.

The Year in Review – Selected Accomplishments from FY 2006 – 2007

The Institute made important strides toward mission achievement in 2006-2007. The goals established by the Board and staff in 2003 continued to guide our program and budget decisions. We strengthened ongoing core functions, like the **LINCS** and laid the foundation for new initiatives that will meet emerging needs of the literacy field and support the priorities of our Interagency Group members. The Institute also made significant progress on several initiatives that had their genesis in Board recommendations. And we continued to blaze trails in the production of quality print materials for all age groups across the lifespan. The Institute broke new ground when it identified two, high-visibility partners that are helping us to elevate literacy and reach new audiences. But the best came last in FY 2007: the Institute was invited to testify before Congress and was the only witness to discuss workforce development from a literacy perspective. We also had the opportunity to jumpstart the Commission on Reading Research, and we received the long-awaited report of the National Early Literacy Panel. It was a busy year *and* a very productive one.

Here are just a few of the highlights from our achievements in FY 2006-2007:

In 2006, the Institute concluded the first phase of work on developing a research agenda for adult literacy, as recommended by its Advisory Board and subsequently requested by Secretary Spelling's Interagency Adult Education Coordinating Group. The draft research agenda has been submitted to the Advisory Board and Interagency Group for review and comment. Embargoed copies have also been provided to key constituent groups for stakeholder feedback. With finalization of the agenda underway, the Institute now begins the second phase of work, which includes producing systematic reviews of the literature on selected issues identified in the research agenda. The product of this second phase of work will be authoritative reports on the state of knowledge about each of the selected issues, further refinement of the research questions identified in the agenda and, potentially, roundtables of research and practice experts who will inform the development of spin-off products based on the research reports.

The Institute initiated work on the Board-recommended "Literacy Research Initiative," a special collection of research and evaluation studies on literacy and the basic skills of reading, writing, and math. Information in the collection will provide users with a comprehensive view of the knowledge base on adolescent and adult literacy. The collection will feature ancillary materials from the research program that is jointly funded by the Institute, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), and the U.S. Department of Education. These materials will include assessments, curricula, and other materials developed by the NICHD-NIFL-ED adult reading researchers to conduct their studies. The materials have potential for use by a broader audience and so will be among the first content material in the new collection.

Translating research into high-quality resources for educators, parents, and adult literacy providers has been a traditional strength of the Institute. And our work this past year continued the Institute's record of achievement in this area. Our publications continue to rank among the Top 10 most requested publications in the EdPubs, the Institute's and Department of Education's national clearinghouse, inventory. The Institute's ***Put Reading First: A Parent Guide, Dad's Playbook, A Child Becomes a Reader: Kindergarten Through Grade 3, Shining Stars: Kindergartners Learn to Read, and Put Reading First: The Teacher's Guide*** claimed the first five positions on EdPub's Top 10 requested publications list. In addition, *La Lectura Es Lo Primero*, the Institute's only Spanish-language title, is ranked #1 in Spanish-language publications distributed by EdPubs.

The Institute released nine new publications in 2006-2007. *Q.Ed: Scientific Evidence for Adult Literacy Educators*, a newsletter for adult educators, was among those new publications. The new ***Shining Stars*** series for parents also made its debut this year. And our new brochure on scientifically based reading research summarized our longer monograph on the same topic, making this important information even more accessible to teachers. Our publication for content area teachers on adolescent reading filled such an important gap in the literature that we had to release "preview copies" in response to numerous requests for it.

These dissemination achievements resulted from the Institute's work conceptualizing and producing high-quality resources for educators, parents, literacy providers, and policymakers. This work situates the Institute as more than a clearinghouse in the literacy field, it is the bedrock of our leadership efforts in bringing together diverse members of the literacy community to work toward knowledge creation and service improvements. Our consultations and roundtable discussions with experts, representatives of our target audiences, and literacy stakeholders— an important part of the resource development process—ensure the Institute's resources are of the highest quality, based on the most recent and rigorous research, and have buy-in of constituent groups for whom they are designed. That buy-in increases the chances that these products will be used in practice, and not just gather dust on a bookshelf.

Last year, the Institute convened several significant conferences and expert roundtables. The roundtables included a meeting of nationally recognized researchers who discussed with Institute staff the state of the research on reading, writing, and numeracy. This roundtable provided significant guidance toward advancing our work on teaching adults to read and expanding our work in adult literacy to include more of the basic skills delineated in the Workforce Investment Act, the Institute's authorizing legislation. This legislation recognizes writing, speaking in English, and computing as literacy skills, in addition to reading. The experts' input also informed and helped shape the research agenda the Institute developed in response to Advisory Board recommendation. An embargoed copy of the draft agenda has been provided to the Interagency Group, key constituent groups, and the Advisory Board for review and comment.

The Institute also convened its roundtable of experts on adult English Language acquisition in 2006 as the first step in planning the Institute's work in this area. This group of nationally recognized experts has provided important expertise on the state of the research in this area, research needed to strengthen the knowledge base, and resources needed to support improved instruction. As a result of this group's work, the Institute has identified important topics for commissioned papers that, if funded, will strengthen the knowledge base needed by practitioners and policymakers.

This past year, in addition to the roundtables already described, the Institute convened its roundtable of experts on adult literacy. This expert group, like the English Language Learner expert roundtable, is part of a formal, systematic planning effort launched by the Institute in 2005 to help ensure new activities undertaken by the Institute are planned in consideration of the research and practice needs of the adult literacy field. The roundtable concluded its work with recommendations to the Institute on commissioned papers that can contribute to expanding the knowledge base and activities that can advance practice. This group included nationally recognized experts from the research and practice communities. The recommendations of this group and the English Language Learner' expert roundtable will inform the development of the Institute's strategic plan, including identification of future strategic partnerships and prioritization of the Institute's goals for mission accomplishment.

Last year the Institute convened its first national summit since it planned and conducted the 1999 White House Summit on Literacy. Our 2006 Summit on community literacy brought together 75 state, local, and federal representatives of literacy organizations along with representatives from foundations and business to provide information on how community-based literacy groups can improve instruction through use of research-based instructional techniques and to discuss the importance of accountability for student outcomes. The Summit has spurred additional work by others on this issue.

Next month, *ProLiteracy* will continue the work begun at the Summit by including a national panel and strand of sessions devoted to community literacy issues. As a follow-up to the Summit and to advance the work done there, a small coalition of individuals from various stakeholder groups now meets monthly. The Institute's own follow up work includes the development of a commissioned paper by a nationally recognized performance measurement expert on the topic of performance management for community literacy programs. The Community Literacy Summit and the commissioned paper on performance measures, both resulted from Advisory Board recommendations.

We negotiated strategic partnerships that resulted in national exposure about the importance of literacy and showcased the Institute's publications. The May broadcast of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* that featured one of our new publications, the ***ESSENCE Cares: A Mentoring and Literacy Guide***, reached 18 million viewers in 123 countries worldwide. That show has aired twice, increasing our national *and* international exposure. Our insert for parents, ***Literacy Begins at Home***, appeared in the September issue of ***Essence magazine***, reaching more than 1.5 million readers, subscribers, and households. The ***Essence*** partnership also brought literacy and the Institute's work national exposure through our participation in the ***Essence Music Festival's Empowerment Seminar*** series in July. The Festival and its seminars, where I spoke on the importance of literacy, drew over 5,000 attendees. Our communications outreach efforts and the partnership led to guest appearances for me on two popular radio talk shows in New Orleans Louisiana. During the interviews, I was able to speak to variety of listeners who were engaged. Some shared their personal challenges with literacy and reading.

Our partnership with Mocha Moms, Inc. formally launches in just one week when I address attendees at the group's Southeast Regional Education Conference. The Conference, co-sponsored by the National Council of Negro Women, will provide parents with the tools they need to "Close the Gap on Minority Achievement." The "Moms, who welcome individuals of all religions, races, educational levels and income levels, seek "to educate, strengthen and empower parents by arming them with information that will foster their child(ren)'s passion for learning, while also helping their child(ren) thrive inside the classroom." With 5,000 members in more than 100 chapters across the nation, the Mocha Moms are a powerful partner in the Institute's efforts to help improve minority children's academic achievement, one of the Secretary of Education's top priorities.

These new partnerships, and others we are negotiating, grow out of a carefully conceived plan for developing strategic partnerships that increase penetration of our target audiences, create new audiences for our work, and support the priorities of our Interagency Group members. Both the ESSENCE CARES and Mocha Moms initiatives support Secretary Spelling's priority of eliminating the minority achievement gap and facilitate the Institute's efforts to reach more parents and educators in minority communities, an important target audience for NCLB and our own dissemination activities. Other partnerships we are pursuing will also allow us to reach deeper into the Hispanic community.

Raising national awareness of literacy and its importance was the impetus for our webcasts and for featuring more experts as special guests on our 12 discussion lists during the past year. More than 566 viewers from across the country logged on to our site last year to learn more about health literacy; 546 viewers logged on for our webcast on scientifically-based strategies for teaching adults to read. Our discussion lists hosted 27 guest speaker events who addressed a wide range of topics, including the components of numeracy and numeracy instruction, international literacy, innovative practices in Project-Based Learning, and the state of literacy in Louisiana post-Katrina. This online interaction with experts from the research and practitioner communities was a valuable professional development opportunity for the more than 7,700 subscribers to the Institute's discussion lists. Through these discussions, we not only give literacy practitioners an opportunity to increase their knowledge, but also raise the visibility of literacy and important related issues for the wider community.

The most significant opportunity to raise literacy on the national agenda came in the form of invitations to offer testimony in the reauthorization hearings for the Workforce Investment Act and for the Congressional Black Caucus' Education Summit. In June, on behalf of the Institute, I testified before the Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning, and Competitiveness in the U.S. House of Representatives. My testimony focused on the continuing needs for adult education and linked the issue to our nation's economic competitiveness. Highlighting findings from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy, I was the only witness to address the reauthorization issues from a "literacy" perspective. In July, at the invitation of Representative Bobby Scott, I spoke on the literacy challenges facing minority youth and adults at the Congressional Black Caucus' Summit on African-American Education. The Summit drew a diverse audience, including representatives of the national media.

The Institute also made significant progress on several of its most important initiatives in 2006. The National Early Literacy Panel delivered its report and with the peer review underway, we look toward publication of this important work by Spring 2008. We also named a chairperson for the Commission on Reading Research and filled all but 3 of the Commission seats. Plans are underway to convene the first Commission meeting before the end of this calendar year. Another important milestone achieved in the Institute's ongoing work was the redesign and launching of a new homepage for the Institute. And the redesign work continues, now focusing on the **LINCS** webpages. The

redesign goes beyond graphic changes to encompass improvements in navigability of the site and its content.

The Institute also mounted a successful staff recruitment campaign in 2006, making significant progress in staffing the Institute in accordance with the Board-endorsed human resources plan. That plan identified the critical positions needed to carry out the Institute's core mission as well as the core competencies staff should possess. We filled all of the critical vacancies needed to strengthen our management infrastructure—budget analyst, contract specialist, and communications director—and hired an early childhood specialist to oversee dissemination of the National Early Literacy Panel's report, development of the related products, and to manage the Institute's Early Reading First work.

The Institute continued its campaign to recruit additional highly qualified staff and, by the end of FY 2006, identified three additional candidates who are well qualified to fill remaining critical positions on the project staff. These positions include a Program Director, an English Language Learner project officer, and a K-3 reading project officer, who also has experience with parent outreach and health literacy issues. With the addition of these staff, the Institute will have the core staff necessary to carry out its work.

As we head into the new fiscal year, there are several important considerations to which we must attend. The Institute's staff is currently responsible for managing 45 active projects that represent a financial investment of about \$6.3 million this year. In the past four years, we have rapidly expanded our programs and activities to build the foundation for addressing literacy issues across the lifespan. But this comprehensive effort can only be maintained through a careful prioritization of our goals and their attendant activities. The Institute can't be all things to all people; instead the principles that guided our contributions in the Institute's early years are relevant now.

First, with a small staff and modest budget, the Institute should focus its resources in a few critical areas, supporting projects with the potential to result in significant service improvements or advancement in the knowledge. Second, we should maintain an on-going conversation with the communities we serve—while our job is to provide leadership for the advancement of the field, we cannot succeed alone. Strong partnerships with federal, regional, state, and local governmental and non-governmental entities are requisite to our success.

And there have been lessons to take forward from more recent years. The Board's guidance on partnerships grows more relevant each year: wherever possible, we should use our funds to leverage greater support from partners who can bring the needed expertise and dollars to the table to ensure our efforts have a significant impact. From our work building the very successful Partnership for Reading collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education and the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, we've learned the value of marshalling our resources across agency lines

and sending a strong coherent message about the importance of evidence-based practice and the application of scientifically based reading research to practice.

But most importantly, we must remember that literacy is not solely an educational domain, rather it is a skill needed in all the major activities in life, in all the contexts in which we operate—home, school, workplace, and community. The commitment to interagency coordination and cooperation has to remain central to the Institute’s way of doing business—otherwise, we achieve less than is needed, less than is possible. And that is not acceptable.