

Foreword

The publication of *Taking the Lead on Adolescent Literacy* marks an exciting moment for schools, students, and educational leaders across the country. It reflects a change in our understanding of literacy, and makes available the results of years of work to understand and bring attention to the needs of upper elementary, middle, and high school students. These adolescent learners have been overlooked far too long in the necessary, yet incomplete, efforts to improve schools and student learning.

When Carnegie Corporation's Advancing Literacy initiative was launched in 2003 the educational community and the country at large had awakened anew to the underlying crisis of literacy achievement in our schools. In 2001, The National Academy of Science release, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, along with the *Report of the National Reading Panel*, shaped the design of early-elementary literacy initiatives made possible by Title I funds, especially Reading First and Early Reading First. Additional funds provided much-needed resources for research in the area of early reading. While there were certainly controversies about the implementation of the government programs, the investment in reading was welcomed by many.

At the same time, educators' interest in the less-explored issue of adolescent literacy was on the rise. Two important publications helped catalyze this attention. The International Reading Association's excellent paper, *Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement*, raised awareness and provided a primer for understanding adolescents' struggle with reading. The RAND Reading Study Group's report, *Reading for Understanding*, underscored the literacy skills needed for comprehension of complex text. These reports were released just as philanthropic dollars were being heavily invested in high school reform and at the same time that the Foundations realized that incoming ninth graders—as many as 70 percent according to the Nation's Report Card—were significantly behind in reading skills.

Carnegie Corporation of New York seized the moment, building upon its legacy of improving and expanding educational attainment with the launch of the Advancing Literacy Initiative. The goal was to ensure that middle and high school students received the attention they deserved and to address what the Corporation's president, Vartan Gregorian, had identified as a:

challenging disconnect in our educational system, namely, that what is expected in academic achievement for middle and high school students has significantly increased, [yet] the way in which students are taught to read, comprehend, and write about subject matter has not kept pace with the demands of schooling (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010, p viii.)

As the program officer leading this work, it became clear to me that not only was it essential to develop knowledge and practices around adolescent literacy, it was also essential to address the twin needs of developing public support and finding ways to engage schools so that adolescent literacy would be a priority. We saw early on that leadership would be a key component in bringing critical mass and sustainability to adolescent literacy improvements over time. In fact, in the first report of the Advancing Literacy Program, *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004) “leadership” was one of the 15 critical elements included.

To bring the work of adolescent literacy to scale, to make strides in increased academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and college attainment, we need to engage school leaders—especially principals—in this Herculean effort. But how? How do school leaders strategically plan for schoolwide change? How do school literacy leaders create a vision for literacy-rich schools? How can the use of data establish a foundation for focusing on literacy?

Taking the Lead on Adolescent Literacy: Action Steps for Schoolwide Success effectively tackles and answers these compelling questions. This thorough and practical guide is designed to help school and district leaders create and execute a successful plan for adolescent literacy. Judith Irvin and her colleagues present the knowledge, expertise, and mix of strategies needed for school and district leaders to develop a comprehensive plan, support teachers to improve instruction, use data, build leadership capacity, and allocate resources. These basic principles will put schools on track to an improved, sustained culture of literacy and student performance.

Now is exactly the right time for *Taking the Lead on Adolescent Literacy*: the data are available, the need is understood, and effective practices have been identified. The wealth of knowledge in this book paves the way for educational leaders to transform the educational outcomes and lives of their adolescent students.

This book will give you confidence, direction, and the necessary tools to enhance your own leadership, decision-making, and vision for your school. Good luck!

—Andrés Henríquez
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