

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Office of the Superintendent
825 North Capitol Street, N. E., 9th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20002-4232
202-442-5885, fax: 202-442-5026
www.k12.dc.us

April 25, 2001

The Honorable Mike DeWine, Chairman
The Honorable Mary L. Landrieu, Ranking Democrat
District of Columbia Appropriations Subcommittee
United States Senate
S-128 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman DeWine and Senator Landrieu:

Over the past two years, the District of Columbia Public Schools has been engaged in a partnership with Voyager Expanded Learning to provide extended day and summer programs for our students. On average, students gained five to nine months growth in a five-week summer program. Needless to say, we have been very pleased with this program.

Last week, representatives of Voyager Expanded Learning met with my staff and I to discuss the Universal Literacy System. This new system has combined key elements of research that define what is needed in order to successfully teach all students to read by grade three. We are impressed with the concept and are interested in expanding the partnership with Voyager, by consideration of piloting the Universal Literacy system in selected schools for grades K-1.

In order for this system to be piloted in our School District, it is necessary that we acquire additional funding. This letter is in support of the request presented to you by Voyager for an additional appropriation beyond the requested District of Columbia budget for fiscal year 2002.

On behalf of the children in the District of Columbia Public Schools, I solicit your support by providing us with the means to guarantee reading competence in the early grades and achieving full literacy proficiency by grade three.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for additional information.

Respectfully,

Paul L. Vance
Superintendent

PLV/srp

Children First

We are interested in expanding the Voyager partnership and implementing the Universal Literacy System in all of our elementary schools for grades K-1 for the 2001-02 school year.

In order for this system to be implemented in our Schools, it is necessary that we acquire additional funding. I would support the request by Voyager representatives for an additional Federal appropriation of approximately \$3.1 million in the fiscal year 2002 Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations Bill, beyond any annual funds, to implement the Voyager Universal Literacy System in grades K through first in Orleans Parish Public Schools.

On behalf of the children in the Orleans Parish, I solicit your support by providing us with the means to guarantee reading competence in the early grades and achieving full literacy proficiency by grade three.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for additional information.

Respectfully,



A.G. Davis

MIKE DEWINE
OHIO

140 RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
(202) 224-2315
TDD: (202) 224-9921
senator_m_dewine@dewine.senate.gov
http://dewine.senate.gov

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3505

April 1, 2002

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184 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, and Education
190 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member:

As you consider the Fiscal Year 2003 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill, I respectfully seek your support for a \$6 million literacy demonstration project in Ohio Public Schools for the Voyager Universal Literacy System. This funding would begin the implementation of the Voyager Universal Literacy System in kindergarten and first grade classrooms and would cover the costs of the program for approximately 22,000 students, 1,222 teachers, and 611 administrators.

Voyager's research based comprehensive reading systems are currently operating successfully in more than 1,000 of the nation's largest school districts in 45 states. These systems comprise in-school, after-school, Saturday, and summer school partnerships consisting of 1) a five-day reading certification program for all members in the district responsible for student outcomes in grades K-3, 2) an in school comprehensive curriculum that requires 1 1/2 hours a day for kindergarten and 2 hours for first through third grade, 3) a diagnostic and prescriptive Progress Monitoring System providing teachers with information on weak spots and what to do about them, 4) and extended day and extended year reading intervention, 5) a Home Study Component, and 6) Voyager guarantees that all children entering the system in kindergarten will be successful readers by third grade.

Voyager's three key content partners for its curricula are the Smithsonian Institution, Discovery Channel, and NASA -- engaging children effectively. Learning to read is the single most important factor determining a child's success in school and in life and, unfortunately, the percentage of children who can read has not substantially improved for more than 25 years.

Thank you for your support and consideration of this project. Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact Kristin Bannerman (x9146) in my office.

Very respectfully yours,

MIKE DEWINE
United States Senator

STATE OFFICES:

312 WALNUT STREET
ROOM 2000
CINCINNATI, OH 45202
(513) 783-3260

800 SUPERIOR AVENUE EAST
ROOM 2450
CLEVELAND, OH 44114
(216) 522-7272

37 WEST BROAD STREET
ROOM 520 (CASHWALK)
COLUMBUS, OH 43215
(614) 469-0774

37 WEST BROAD STREET
ROOM 500
COLUMBUS, OH 43215
(614) 469-5185

200 PUTNAM STREET
ROOM 514
MARIETTA, OH 45750
(740) 373-2217

430 MADISON AVENUE
ROOM 1225
TOLEDO, OH 43604
(419) 253-7598

100 WEST MAIN STREET
2ND FLOOR
XENIA, OH 45385
(937) 376-3696

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NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Working Together, We Can. We Must. We Will Succeed!

3510 GENERAL DEGAULLE DRIVE • NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA 70114

A. G. DAVIS (Colonel, USMC, Retired)
Chief Executive Officer
(504) 365-8730
(504) 365-8733 Fax

117501

July 9, 2001

Honorable Mary L. Landrieu
724 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
Attn: Hermann Gesser And Kathleen Strottman

Dear Congresswoman,

Over this last year, the staff as well as the business community of Orleans Parish, have analyzed the need to execute a clear strategy for dramatic improvement in the academic performance of our children. We believe that the one formula that will produce rapid and sustainable gains in student performance is to teach all children to read in the first three years of school.

The one system in the country that guarantees the delivery of 100% literacy for the entire K-3 student population is Voyager's Universal Literacy. This new system has combined key elements of research that define what is needed in order to successfully teach all students to read by grade three. We are most impressed with the concept, as well as the record of increased student performance in districts where there has been a Voyager partnership.

During the 1999-2000 school year, Lafayette Elementary School, a New Orleans Public School, chose the Voyager Expanded Learning basic skill development curricula for four of their extended-day classes. Lafayette is a Title I school with approximately 700 students in pre-K to 6th grade. And, 98% of its students are on free or reduced-cost lunches, and 99% are African-Americans.

I have reviewed the test data from those students who were using the Voyager curricula and it revealed that 97% of the Voyager students who were administered a benchmark oral reading test (Slosson), made gains of up to two years in an eight-month period. Voyager extended-day students were also given the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and 70% of them performed above the 40% on the reading section of this test compared to 16% of non-Voyager students.

Colbert I. King

They Just Can't Read

Something has gone terribly wrong in the District of Columbia. And it has nothing to do with the proposed transfer of services from D.C. General Hospital or the D.C. Council's plans to quash term limits. Or foul-mouthed cops in patrol cars coming on like Neanderthals.

Those events have most of the town's activists in a world-class snit. But the harshest finding is being studiously ignored by our civic leadership: Thousands of D.C. residents are simply not up to the basic requirements of 21st century living.

At least that's the conclusion that leaps off the pages of publications by the State Education Agency for Adult Education at the University of the District of Columbia and the Washington Literacy Council. Both groups report that 62 percent of city residents are in the lowest levels of reading proficiency. That jolting statistic gives the District the distinction of having the lowest level of literacy proficiency in the nation.

And what does it mean for someone to be in the lowest level of literacy? We're talking about grown men and women who read at or below the third-grade level. Literacy experts say these are people who perhaps can sign their 1994 names and find the expiration date on their driver's license. But they don't read well enough to follow written map directions, or fill out an application for a Social Security card, or read prescription and food labels or read a story to a child. One federal study suggests that 80 percent of the District's adults have Level 1 literacy skills.

People at Level 2 are only a little better off. They can do what Level 1 adults cannot—for example, find an intersection on a street map. But Level 2 residents can't write a letter explaining an error on a credit card bill, or use a

bus schedule or read and summarize a newspaper article. About 25 percent of D.C. adults are believed to be in that category.

The situation is appalling. With technology propelling our knowledge-based society toward new frontiers, more than 130,000 District adults have less than a high school diploma or a GED. And our public school dropout rate is reportedly near 40 percent.

A cynic might even ask: What's the value of a D.C. high school diploma? The question is prompted by a quotation I found buried in a report commissioned last year by the city's deputy mayor for children, youth and families: "According to the director of Income Maintenance Administration/Department of Human Services, many employers say they have more faith in the reading ability of someone with a GED than in someone with a high school diploma. The former is more likely to be an indicator of basic reading ability than the latter."

How in the world are thousands of D.C. men and women at the lowest levels of reading proficiency going to compete, let alone make it, in an economy where reading is about as essential as breathing? The answer is already in. They won't.

A city survey last month of 300 District businesses found that more than two-thirds reported having trouble hiring local adults. The principal cause of their trouble? Adult applicants deficient in basic skills, including reading.

But let's get away from the abstract term "adults." Who are we talking about? Nearly 17,000 are District women on welfare. Most are African American women, never married, with one to three children—most under age 4. Two-thirds of these women read at or below the fifth-grade level.

A little more about them. Under federal law,

nearly 2,800 such families will be dropped from the welfare rolls a year from now when federal funds stop flowing. And because of their poor literacy skills and lack of job readiness—a desire to show up for work on time, regularly and properly dressed—they are unlikely to get full-time unsubsidized jobs by next year's deadline. What then? The Williams administration says it is committed to dipping in to city coffers to keep those families going.

Those mothers aren't alone. Other city residents short on literacy skills include people with learning disabilities, juveniles in detention, halfway house and D.C. jail inmates, the homeless and senior citizens. And immigrants with limited English skills may be the city's fastest growing population. The consequences of having so many with so few literacy skills are enormous for social services, schools, health care, public safety and, of course, the District's own viability.

It's a matter of connecting the dots.

The poorly performing tenant who acts out in class (when he bothers to come) is likely to live in a home where few books are present, where no adult bothers to meet with teachers or help with homework, and where everybody relies on TV, radio or the grapevine for information, because they don't read very well.

They are some of the same adults who have trouble navigating their way around the health care system. Studies show that people with poor literacy skills are more likely to miss a doctor's appointment, ignore complicated medical instructions, and not seek health screening for early detection and self-management of problems such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

This multitude with the lowest literacy levels is one of the District's least discussed problems. They are also among the least served.

That's not my assessment. "By the best estimates," reports the mayor's 2001-2002 Policy Agenda, "the District's [Adult Basic Education] system serves less than three percent of city residents in need."

The underfunding of literacy programs is unconscionable. The mayor is supposed to be looking for \$10 million to start a multi-year effort to bring D.C. adults up to speed. Literacy experts say that's about a third of what's needed. In addition, they say, the city's scatter-shot adult learning effort needs to be brought together under one umbrella. But that's all about drawing bureaucratic lines.

Meanwhile, the politicians and preachers—rather than facing this city as it is—are busting a gut over a hospital building. So, as usual in the District, it will fall to others beyond the bureaucracy and the "stylist" and "profilin'" activists to pick up the slack.

When I shut down this computer tonight, I'm off to American University's Washington College of Law to help a group of law students, volunteers and sponsors celebrate the second annual awards and student recognition dinner of a student-formed group called LINK. The city may dither. But these students have joined forces to tutor, mentor and raise scholarships for students at J. Haydon Johnson Junior High in Congress Heights in Southeast Washington. They're helping with the reading and homework. They're exposing these kids to weekend activities they normally wouldn't experience. They're working with parents and adults who want help with their own education.

Unlike the District's throng of high-profile blowhards, these law students—and many other private volunteers around the city just like them—are quietly and valiantly trying to help the District right a terrible wrong.

e-mail: kitngc@washpost.com