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Prescription for Reading Commitment

100,000 of Scholastic's 1 million books - America Reads
→ they agreed to donate more ~~to~~ to match
others' financial contributions
100,000. Puh...
for PR

100,000 books from First Book

60,000 from Random House
260,000

→ 50,000 volunteers from American Book Sellers
for America Reads (some for Prescription)

Some of RIF kids for Prescription

First Lady Announces National Partnership to Prescribe Reading to Infants and Toddlers

April 16, 1997

"There are few things that I believe could make a more dramatic difference over the next 10 years in this country than to persuade parents of all educational and economic levels to take this mission of reading to and talking with their young babies seriously."

-- First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, January 10, 1997

New Partnership to Prescribe Reading and Ensure That Children Who Come to the Doctor Have Access to Books. The First Lady is pleased to announce that a new national partnership has been created to prescribe reading to infants and toddlers. Pediatricians, hospitals, health centers, book publishers, libraries and others are coming together to make sure that infants and toddlers who come to the doctor have access to books and are read to regularly. The American Academy of Pediatrics is recommending that pediatricians prescribe reading to infants and toddlers as part of standard pediatric care.

The New Partnership Has Already Secured:

- More than 250,000 books to be distributed through health clinics and centers around the country;
- Commitments to train 10,000 pediatricians and 950 community health centers to prescribe reading and provide books to hundreds of thousands of children by the year 2000.

The Partnership, Led by Scholastic Inc., First Book, and Reach Out and Read, includes the American Academy of Pediatrics, National Association of Community Health Centers, National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions, American Library Association, Random House, Irving Harris and the Harris Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, American Booksellers Association, Association of American Publishers, Mellon Trust, Dreyfus Corporation, ABC Television, Reading Is Fundamental, National Association of Chain Drug Stores, and the National Community Pharmacists Association, and seeks additional partners.

Under the Reach Out and Read program, volunteers read to children in waiting rooms, health care providers prescribe reading, use books in well-visits, and give books to children at the end of a visit. This model program is already being used in more than 80 health centers and hospitals around the country.

Call to Ensure That by the Year 2000 Every Child Under Age Five Is Read to Regularly. The First Lady is calling for every community to come together using its local library in partnership with local health providers to help encourage reading to young children and ensure that every child under age five is read to regularly by the year 2000. Today, only 39% of parents with children under three read to their children daily [Commonwealth Fund, 1996]. Research shows that when doctors prescribe reading and give books to low-income parents and their children, these parents are *four times* more likely to read to their children [AMA, AJDC, 8/91].

Response to the President's America Reads Challenge and the First Lady's Call for a National Effort to Prescribe Reading to Infants and Toddlers. Today's announcement is in direct response to the First Lady's call in January for a national effort to build on the existing efforts to prescribe reading -- by programs such as Reach Out and Read and the American Library Association's Born to Read -- and to the President's America Reads Challenge to help parents be their children's first teachers and ensure that every child can read well by the end of third grade.

The White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning Will Underscore the Importance of Reading to Infants and Toddlers. *The White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning: What New Research on the Brain Tells Us About Our Youngest Children* will explore new research that shows that reading to children in their first few years actually helps their brain to grow in addition to enhancing their emotional and social development and laying the groundwork for vocabulary and later educational success.

Prescription for Reading

Background

The scientific evidence is now clear and compelling: babies' brains are not "prewired" before birth. Like their physical development which requires nurturing, human brains also need food to grow -- stimulation from parents and caregivers. We know that brain growth during the early years is very rapid and has a profound impact on a child's healthy development and school readiness.

Not surprisingly, we also know that reading to children can be one of the most important actions a parent can take to stimulate a child's learning capacity.

The Need

Unfortunately, far too many parents are unaware of the tremendous opportunity that reading on a regular basis to their young children can provide. According to "Starting Points," the 1994 report of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, fewer than half of American parents read to their infants and toddlers on a regular basis.

This tendency is most concentrated among families with lower incomes, thereby increasing the risk of illiteracy, failure in school, and dependency. But the problem of parents not reading to children crosses the entire socio-economic spectrum, with researchers estimating that several million children under the age of six are not read to on a regular basis.

With a quarter of children being born into homes below the poverty level, there are nearly 1 million newborns -- and almost 6 million children under the age of 6 -- who are most at-risk.

The Opportunity

There is now a very real opportunity to break this pattern of inadequate reading and to establish a new pattern: a pattern of more parents reading more regularly to children. This opportunity is based on several proven and promising programs developed by doctors and early childhood experts, and focuses on early intervention by pediatricians.

Pediatricians have a strong and trusting relationship with parents of young children. By making reading a medical "standard of appropriate care" -- just as immunizations, a healthy diet, and child safety are standards of care -- pediatricians have found that they can help establish strong motivation for reading among families who will benefit the most. And working with libraries and other literacy partners, they have found that they can help build a habit and tradition of reading among at-risk families.

By tying new pediatric practices and access to high quality, developmentally appropriate books, researchers have documented that parents are more likely to read to young children. Such early reading stimulates the brain and increases the likelihood of literacy and success.

Recognizing this confluence of forces, the First Lady brought together representatives from more than two dozen organizations. In the winter and early spring of 1997, she challenged them to come up with a workable, sustainable program that uses doctors to reach these youngest children -- and their parents -- and help lay the foundation for school success and life-long learning.

This challenge has come together as the "Prescription for Reading Partnership."

The Goal

By the year 2000:

- Reading and books will be recognized as an integral part of a healthy childhood, and will be formally integrated into the pediatric "standard of care" for all children, and into the residency training of all pediatricians.
- Every child under the age of six will receive a "prescription for daily reading" from their pediatrician during every well-child check-up. That prescription will reinforce parents' daily reading to children, the importance of helping children grow up with books, and will be accompanied by advice and support from the doctor about ways to stimulate their child's healthy growth and development.
- All children -- and parents -- will have access to books via local libraries, pre-natal clinics, and other agencies, and those 6 million most at-risk children will receive books from pediatricians during every well-child check-up.

The Strategy

The Prescription for Reading initiative will employ a simple, single-minded strategy:

- It will expand a proven program. The Reach Out and Read model developed by the Boston Medical Center will be extended to as many hospitals and community health centers as possible.
- It will extend the ROR approach through other community-based, literacy-and-health-care programs such as the American Library Association's Born to Read effort.

- It will further reinforce the importance of parents reading to children through on-going public service announcements, flyers in children's prescription bags, point of sale materials in pharmacies, book stores, and other vehicles that reach parents of young children.
- Funding for this effort will come from a combination of contributions from foundations, corporations, associations, and when appropriate, government sources.

A Proven Program That Can Be Replicated

In 1989, a collaboration of pediatricians and early childhood educators developed a program called Reach Out and Read (ROR) to make early literacy a standard part of pediatric primary care. ROR doctors "prescribe" reading aloud as part of the advice they give parents at all well-child check-ups from six months of age to five years. After special training, pediatricians provide age-appropriate tips and encouragement to parents. And, whenever possible, the doctor gives the child a new children's book to take home and keep.

This program began at Boston City Hospital -- which serves a very large proportion of children growing up in poverty -- and has grown to more than 80 sites around the nation serving some 175,000 children.

The core of the Prescription for Reading Partnership is the extension of the ROR model.

A Coalition of Community-Based Support Programs

The success of the Prescription for Reading Partnership is dependent upon other local initiatives which support the ROR physician-based model.

For example, since 1993, the Born to Read Project of the Association for Library Service to Children has promoted partnerships between librarians and health care professionals to reach out to parents less likely to read to their new babies. These very special programs, offered at libraries and prenatal clinics, teach parents how to stimulate their children's minds and pave the way for reading by sharing books, stories, fingerplay, and other fun activities.

First Book is a national nonprofit organization committed to giving disadvantaged children their own new books to read and to keep. First Book works with existing community-based family literacy, tutoring and mentoring programs, such as Reach Out and Read and Born to Read, reaching the hardest to reach children. In 1997 First Book will deliver nearly two million new books to children who need them the most.

Similarly, the Association of American Publishers has provided training materials for ROR. Scholastic and Reading is Fundamental (RIF), the nation's oldest and largest literacy organization, have supported ROR with book donations and discounts.

The challenge to the Prescription for Reading Partnership is to ensure that these and other community-based groups continue to work in concert, thereby leveraging limited assets and maximizing effectiveness. To ensure that, all of the parties who have made initial commitments have agreed to participate in an on-going Prescription for Reading steering committee.

The Initial Commitments

The following list of pledges reflects an initial, minimum set of commitments.

- As part of their commitment to America Reads, Scholastic Inc. and their partner First Book will fill the prescription of 200,000 new books through a partnership with pediatricians and health care professionals participating in Reach Out and Read and Born to Read programs;

For every \$100,000 raised in the support of Prescription for Reading, Scholastic will contribute an additional 5,000 books; for every \$500,000 contributed, an additional 35,000 books; and for every \$1 million, 100,000 new books;

- The American Academy of Pediatrics will provide its 53,000 members with a specially designed prescription pad to promote daily reading and age-appropriate activities to stimulate a child's early learning. It will also distribute to its membership checklists for parents and developmental milestones so that they can measure their child's growth and development.
- The Reach Out and Read National Training Center at Boston Medical Center will train 10,000 pediatricians and pediatric residents by the year 2000 to implement Reach Out and Read programs in their local communities;
- Mellon Trust in Boston has announced a \$100,000 grant to Reach Out and Read, and issues a challenge to other companies to match its \$100,000 contribution.
- The National Association of Community Health Centers' 950 member health centers will implement Reach Out and Read programs reaching one million parents and children by the year 2000;

- The National Association of Chain Drug Stores, and the National Community Pharmacists Association, representing the nation's nearly 60,000 community retail pharmacies, will distribute reading tips for parents and suggested book titles to parents coming to the pharmacy to obtain medicines for their children;
- The National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions will challenge its 150 member hospitals to serve as training sites for Reach Out and Read programs, and is setting a goal of tripling the number of early reading programs currently operating in children's hospitals across the country by the year 2000. NACHRI will also disseminate information through its children's hospital members to parents about the importance of daily reading;
- Random House Inc. will contribute 5,000 books a month for twelve months, totaling 60,000 new books to pediatric Reach Out and Read programs;
- The American Library Association will work with the nation's 16,000 public libraries to establish Born to Read programs, promoting partnerships between librarians and health care professionals teaching the critical importance of reading and pre-school learning to parents of the 4 million babies born each year;
- Reading Is Fundamental, the nation's oldest and largest children's literacy organization, will reach nearly 4 million children this year ensuring that each receives at least three new books of their own. Among those served are many of the nation's youngest and neediest children in health clinics, immunization programs, hospitals, and Reach Out and Read programs.

- The American Booksellers Association -- through its 3,700 member bookstores across the country -- will recruit 50,000 reading tutors and other volunteers for the America Reads Challenge, linking volunteers to health care professionals working with early reading and literacy programs. The recruitment drive will be launched at BookExpo America at the end of May. Additionally, any new children's books remaining following the BookExpo convention will be distributed through First Book to Reach Out and Read Programs;
- The Association of American Publishers will provide the Reach Out and Read Training Manual and other ancillary materials used in ROR programs across the country. AAP is also making an initial contribution to help fund the start-up of a statewide Reach Out and Read initiative starting up in Texas.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation has committed to a grant of \$150,000 to the Reach Out and Read National Training Center, bringing Casey's long term support to \$600,000. Original funding from the Casey Foundation was used to create the Reach Out and Read National Training Center to support the programs' expansion beyond Boston.
- Irving Harris and the Harris Foundation of Chicago are committed to a minimum of \$100,000 in grants to initiate a city-wide implementation of a ROR program in Chicago by 2000.
- The Dreyfus Corporation in New York City has announced a \$50,000 grant to Reach Out and Read for New York City programs.
- ABC Television will produce and air a special Children First public service announcement highlighting the importance of reading to children on a daily basis.

An On-Going Challenge -- and Commitment

To ensure the success of the Prescription for Reading Partnership, the organizations, associations, and corporations which have made the initial commitments to the Partnership:

- Call on business leaders, publishers, health care providers, pharmacies, literacy programs, publishers, and others to join in creating a healthy future for our youngest citizens;
- Agree to draft -- within four weeks -- a strategic plan for the initiative;
- Will participate on a steering committee dedicated to achieving the stated goals by the year 2000.

For more information about how to support the Partnership call 1-800-905-4363
