

EDUCATION WEEK

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Letter

Emphasis on K-3 Reading Urged in Renewed ESEA

To the Editor:

Regarding your article "Report Targets 3rd Grade Reading as Crucial Turning Point," (June 9, 2010):

The Annie E. Casey Foundation report released last month, "Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters," impressively documents America's failure to educate low-income children in reading. We thank the foundation for its excellent analysis and its contribution to policymakers and practitioners.

Experience Corps, a national program offering adult tutoring and support for students, has for 15 years been focused on helping at-risk children reach reading proficiency by the 4th grade. Our 2,000 volunteers, all community members age 55 and older, serve some 20,000 high-need K-3 students in 22 cities. A recent study from Washington University in St. Louis and Mathematica Policy Research shows that participating students achieve 60 percent greater gains in academic performance over similar students not taking part in the program.

We know that it is not possible for Experience Corps alone to reach all the children who need our assistance, and that investments must be made to identify and scale other effective youth-literacy programs. As the Casey Foundation report reminds us, the cost of failure is high: Without the basic building block of reading, students will have serious difficulty learning more-advanced subjects in later grades, and in gaining life and employment skills.

We hope the Casey report will persuade Congress to continue a strong emphasis on early reading as it undertakes reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. As provisions are made for coordination of reading instruction across grades, it is imperative that investments in K-3 literacy not be diminished.

Lester Strong
Chief Executive Officer
Experience Corps
Washington, D.C.