



**Education leaders** throughout West Michigan understand the importance of developing talent that is career ready and college capable. While there are a variety of metrics (8<sup>th</sup> grade math achievement, ACT and NCRC scores, graduation rates) that help us gauge our success, no milestone may be more indicative of students' future achievement than their early reading proficiency. While good results on all commonly accepted metrics remain our mission, in no other area are the measures so reliable and valid, the prognosis for poor performance so clear, and the collective industry knowledge so deep.

That's why superintendents from ten West Michigan counties have coalesced around a collaborative initiative...the Reading Now Network...to insure we meet Michigan's goal: a minimum 80% of third graders in all demographic groups read proficiently at grade level and that intervention strategies be systemically implemented for the 20% who, due to normal developmental differences, take a little longer.

### **The stakes have never been higher**

One in six children who do not read proficiently in third grade fail to graduate from high school on time, four times the rate for children with proficient third grade reading skills.<sup>i</sup>

The third and fourth grade years are pivotal. Fourth graders struggling to read begin to lag in many, if not most, subject areas; comprehension and vocabulary suffer.

These challenges, however, can be best mitigated when leading practices in early intervention and instructional methods are identified, shared, and implemented BEFORE a child reaches fourth grade. While today's schools are forced to compete with each other on many fronts, school leaders in the Reading Now Network are committed to sharing these practices on behalf of the region's children. The Reading Now Network embraces two powerful philosophical positions:

1. There is a moral and economic imperative to the relentless pursuit of early literacy.
2. We must collectively own both our successes and struggles because every child is a valued and important member...now and in the future...of our West Michigan community and the world beyond.

### **The Reading Now Network** will:

- Benchmark successful early literacy practices in other countries, states, and across our own region
- Implement proven, research-based K-3 literacy instruction and interventions
- Marshal the region's K-3 literacy expertise and experts on behalf of all the region's children
- Design and deliver teacher professional development that reflects best practices in K-3 literacy
- Openly share successful strategies for early intervention, remediation, and acceleration
- Open our classrooms to cross-regional learning, highlighting "bright spot" innovative practices
- Identify and promote community-wide support and involvement in helping our students read
- Assist parents with at-home strategies, including non-English speaking or non-reading parents
- Hold each other accountable for our mutual success

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<sup>i</sup> 2011 AEC Foundation National Longitudinal Study