



# Education Watch

Enhancing Flexibility & Accountability ■ Leaving No Child Behind

U.S. House Education & the Workforce Committee ■ John Boehner, Chairman  
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## President's Early Reading Initiatives Pave Way for IDEA Reform

Congress will soon take a major step to improve early learning opportunities for disadvantaged children with approval of President Bush's Reading First and Early Reading First initiatives. Both are part of the education bills approved by the House and Senate, and both pave the way for reform of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which will be a priority for Congress after completion of the current ESEA overhaul.

As *Washington Post* columnist David Broder noted in a column Wednesday on early childhood education: "More and more research is showing that brain development and acquisition of learning skills in the first five years largely determine later school achievement. And research demonstrates that high-quality preschool programs pay off, not just in better student performance but also in preventing dropouts, delinquency, and juvenile crime." The President's reading initiatives emphasize scientifically based instruction to ensure that children in Head Start and other pre-school programs learn vital pre-reading skills before entering grade school.

At the same time, problems with existing programs such as IDEA limit opportunities for minority children. Due to flaws in IDEA's current structure, minority children are over-identified for special education services, and local school districts that serve them are enmeshed in paperwork rather than service delivery. Some children are being diagnosed as needing IDEA services simply because they did not receive proper early reading instruction.

Congress must move quickly to approve the President's reading initiatives and begin the process of fixing IDEA.

### Message of the Day

**Effective reading instruction can help prevent disadvantaged children from falling behind.**

- *The President's Reading First initiative triples funding for scientifically based reading instruction programs. Ensuring that more children receive effective reading instruction means that more children will receive the help they need, when they need it most.*
- *Reading First will also reduce the cost burden on all levels of government as fewer children are diagnosed as needing IDEA services simply because they did not receive proper reading instruction during the early years.*
- *IDEA must be fixed to prevent the over-identification of minority children, and to ease the paperwork burden on local schools.*

### DAILY EDUCATION FACTS

- A recent University of Michigan study found that more than 20 percent of U.S. first-graders have severe reading difficulties. Of those children, nearly 3 in 4 are likely to remain poor readers. More than 10 million American children have trouble reading, the study found. (Laurence McQuillan, *USA Today*, July 26, 2001)
- First Lady Laura Bush opens a two-day summit today aimed at improving early education in America -- one of her top priorities. Education Secretary Rod Paige and HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson will join her for the summit.
- Under H.R. 1, states participating in the Reading First program will have the option to receive "Early Reading First" funding to implement proven, research-based reading programs in Head Start and existing pre-school programs.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

*"The President understands that a six-year-old is only six one time and that we should identify high risk students early and use explicit, intensive and systemic phonics instruction to help keep them on track. . . There couldn't be a better time to focus on literacy."* -- **Rep. Anne Northup (R-KY), testimony before House Education and the Workforce Committee, March 28, 2001**