



Executive Viewpoint

Kevin S. Casey, Executive Director

Our Most Valuable Resource

This article is being written immediately after Thanksgiving while I am still recovering from hosting my extended family for much of the holiday weekend. I am thankful for good health; (semi) independent children; and siblings, nieces, and nephews, and their families, with whom I enjoy spending time. After all the guests left and the clean-up completed, what struck me in the post-holiday quiet was the value of time.

Like most families just before Thanksgiving, we

were engaged in a rush of preparation consisting of multiple trips to the grocery store and cleaning and decorating the house to the extent that it bore only a faint resemblance to our normal living conditions. We then focused on preparing and serving food, cleaning and repeating. Seemingly in a blink of an eye, family members were saying good-bye and the holiday weekend was over. I likely will not see my children again until Christmas, which prompted me to consider how frequently we squander our most valuable resource.

I know of many educators who express frustration at the variety of mandates which impose upon their time. These are not lazy or uncommitted people, but rather committed professionals who could use their time more productively if they had the freedom to exercise professional judgment as needed by the particular circumstances that they face. Commonly applicable regulations, most often well-intended, almost by definition assume a common need, which is an unwarranted assumption. Each and every mandate consumes time, and in my experience most educators feel they could be more effective with more time.

In January 2019, a new legislative session will begin in Albany. Legislators from around the state will visit, on a part-time basis, to discharge their legislative responsibilities. Unlike

last year the Senate will be led by Democrats, but many issues they will face have been raised before.

I expect that there will again be debate about fully funding foundation aid, and whether or not past due amounts will ever be paid. Repeat topics may also include fully funding universal pre-K, school safety legislation, help in addressing mental health issues in our schools, and yet another modification of the teacher and principal evaluation law, among other things.

I recognize that there are many needs, and many advocates advancing a variety of worthy causes will be competing for limited state resources. It is my hope that the legislators will recognize the value of time while they are in Albany. Like my Thanksgiving weekend, they can spend their time in preparation and clean-up and find themselves

wondering where their time went at the end of session. They can again kick the foundation aid, universal pre-K, or mental health cans down the road, but to do so is to deny support to those people, adults and children alike, who need support now, and whose needs should not be put on hold.

Part of what makes time so valuable is that there is no hold or rewind button. All we have to act is the here and now. Value judgments need to be made for the children of today because tomorrow, for many, is too late. I urge the legislators not to make my mistake. The value of a clean house is greatly overrated. ■

Reading Again: The Science of Reading

Sponsor Opinion Piece by Dr. Bruce H. Crowder, Senior Researcher, Educational Vistas, Inc.

Throughout the nation, reading continues to be an elusive and challenging skill for many students. Nonetheless, American educators have been aware of the science of reading for some time. Research indicates that students who fail to master reading by the end of third grade either drop out or finish high school with reduced lifetime earning potential. Simply put, one goal for all educators is to improve a child's reading comprehension.

While learning may be a natural process, the same

is not true of reading. Decades of cognitive research reveals that learning to read is not a natural process. Students must be taught specifically how to connect sounds with letters - phonics. A consistent research finding is that students become better readers when they receive explicit and systematic phonetic instruction. This method is more effective than letting students discover concepts about reading on their own. Additionally, it provides the foundation for writing.

However, research is clear that phonics by itself is not enough. Learning to decode words without knowing what they mean is not helpful for understanding. Of course, when teaching vocabulary, many techniques exist, but there are important factors to remember. There is the need to understand academic vocabulary - tier 2 and domain-specific words. Students need to hear these words pronounced, defined, and applied in context. Word maps help students to learn new words by associating them with antonyms and synonyms, writing one's own definitions, and using words in sentences. Moreover, teaching suffixes, roots, and affixes is invaluable.

Preparing students for

entry into the world of content knowledge is critical as the foundation for their background understanding about the world. This knowledge will come as a result of expanding the curriculum for reading to other topics including social studies and science. When students know something about a topic, they are encouraged to read more about it and discuss it further.

Ultimately, the goal is to produce students who have acquired the ability to extract inferences, synthesize, and retain important information. All of which leads to the growth of a human mind.

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Dr. Bruce H. Crowder is a senior researcher for Educational Vistas, Inc. His work is primarily focused on creating pathways for deeper learning for all students through a dynamic curriculum replete with strategic performances. Dr. Crowder may be reached at bcrowder@edvistas.com. ■

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