

# THE POWER4Kids Reading INITIATIVE

Editorial by Cinthia

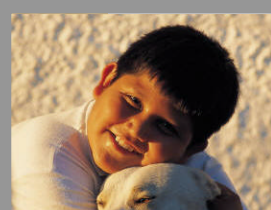


One of the ways a society can be measured is the treatment it gives to the youngest of its members. Sadly, by any measure, millions of American children are failing to achieve their potential in our schools. For example, in April 2001, the National Center on Education Statistics reported that 38% of our nation's fourth grade students couldn't read and understand a simple paragraph taken from an age-appropriate book. Learning differences in children and unproven reading programs are two major contributors to this calamity. This statistic becomes more disheartening when we realize that reading is the cornerstone of academic and lifelong success; academic failure leads to feelings of self-doubt, worthlessness and depression, the culmination of which is the gradual destruction of the spirit of a child.

THE HAAN FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN, which is dedicated to developing educational solutions, is sponsoring the POWER4Kids Reading Initiative to directly confront this set of mounting and imminently remediable issues. This vital work is the collaborative effort of strategic partners. The core of the Initiative is an unprecedented classroom analysis—involving thousands of children—that is designed to obtain indisputable evidence that will determine the most effective reading intervention programs in our country. Simply stated, the POWER4Kids Reading Initiative will establish which programs work and for whom.

There is a great momentum for a new era in schooling. For example, uniform standards, accountability and assessments are projected to improve markedly as a result of new legislation. In support of this, the POWER4Kids Initiative is designed to gather clear, empirically based facts—indisputable evidence—and disseminate this evidence to parents, teachers, school administrators and public officials. Just as President Bush wants to assess the progress of children to ensure “No Child is Left Behind”, the POWER4Kids Reading Initiative wants to assess the programs we are promoting in our classrooms. If we are to spend billions of dollars to reverse academic failure, we must ensure that this money is not wasted on methods and programs that fail our children. Today, curricular decision-making is based too frequently on anecdotal beliefs and hypotheses about what works, often more influenced by marketing than research. This is simply not the answer to how we can rescue 20 million children from academic failure. For the current or any Education Bill to succeed, we must be able to guarantee that every child is given the opportunity to learn under scientifically, clinically proven programs.

If implemented as planned, the requirement in the new Education Bill for extensive reading assessments will illuminate the overwhelming number of at-risk and under-served students. We believe these assessments will produce staggering statistics identifying millions of American children who are not reading at a basic level. This will create enormous pressure, which will have the effect of forcing parents, teachers and policymakers to seek results-driven evidence on programs that accelerate skill development. The States that wish to earn appropriations from the “No Child Left Behind” and “Achievement in Education” federal bonus funds will further feed the demand for evidence. Conversely, the States that are not performing well will need to minimize reductions to their administrative appropriations by quickly implementing proven, successful programs. The POWER4Kids Reading Initiative will provide this essential and currently unavailable knowledge. *(Continued on the other side)*





**“If your plan is for a year, plant rice;  
If your plan is for a decade, plant trees;  
If your plan is for a lifetime, educate Children.”**

**-- Confucius**

*(Continued)*

Research conducted by The National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) over the past five years has demonstrated that more than half of all children learn to read regardless of the method, programs or teachers; the remaining children, however, require systematic and explicit instruction to become average or above average readers. Dr. G. Reid Lyon, Chief of the NICHD, notes that in the majority of cases, reading failure deprives the students of their ability to learn about literature, science, mathematics, history and social studies. If students cannot read their textbooks, they cannot learn. What else can they do? Of the total student population with reading problems, at least 15% will eventually dropout of high school; and, only 2% percent will complete a 4-year program at an institution of higher learning. Furthermore, upsetting statistics confirm that millions of these same youths will engage in high-risk behavior like drug abuse, alcoholism, criminal activities, teen suicide, and end up chronically unemployed.

The cycle of learning failure doesn't end there. There are spiraling effects that affect, profoundly, not only the individual, but also their communities and our society at large. These effects represent an unnecessary loss of human potential for the individual and society. And, most of these effects can be prevented: by careful assessment at younger ages; by better teacher training; by the use of proven methods of instruction; and, by systematic evaluations of progress.

Through my journey in the last few years, I have become confident we can greatly improve education. The importance of joining together business, education, government and science to alter this destructive course could not be more clear to me. We need your help. We must have a shared effort of strategic partners from the private sectors (communities, businesses, parents and foundations) as well as from the public sector of government and education. This is the only way we can enact change and ensure that our nation's and our President's huge financial commitment to education is not wasted on out-dated, unproven philosophies and programs that provide minimal or no clear results for our children during their critical developmental years.

Current research has demonstrated that early assessment together with effective instruction can eradicate a huge portion of the overwhelming problems associated with learning and reading failure. There are no overnight miracle cures, but there are methods that we know work. The **POWER4Kids** Reading Initiative will present the indisputable evidence necessary to ensure the reading programs, which achieve the "Bar of Excellence" in producing strong reading skills, will be the programs that are taught to our children in this country. With this evidence and with this knowledge base about which tools work for which children, we will change public policy and, thankfully, the life cycles of vast numbers of under-served youths.

In the early part of 2003, the **POWER4Kids** Initiative will expand our focus from reading fluency for all children, to encompass a series of clinical studies in math and writing skill development. It is time for you to become a **POWER4Kids** Partner. Together, we will set in motion a new, life-affirming cycle where the values we place today on educating our young will create for the future, adults with the capacity to succeed as happy, productive, multi-dimensional human beings, as well as great parents, citizens and friends.

