



## **ADVANCING ADOLESCENT LITERACY**

The 52,000 members of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) urge Congress to make adolescent literacy a priority in funding and policy initiatives aimed at increasing student success and improving graduation rates. NCTE supports enactment of research-based adolescent literacy measures such as the Striving Readers Act and Success in the Middle.

**Literacy development continues throughout schooling and is a pathway to academic success, civic participation, and the working world.**

- Literacy learning is continuous and requires ongoing development and practice; secondary school students need explicit instruction in reading and writing.
- Increased abilities in literacy engender increased participation in civic life.
- The U.S. share of the global college-educated workforce has fallen from 30 percent to 14 percent in recent decades as young workers in developing nations outstrip their U.S. peers in demonstrating employer-satisfying proficiency in literacy.<sup>1</sup>

**The literacy skill set changes as content becomes more challenging and diverse.**

- The reading and writing learned in elementary school is not sufficient to support learning in high school and college because each discipline introduces new and complex language.
- Recent work in linguistics shows how teachers can help adolescents engage with new content in a variety of disciplines.
- Adolescents' achievement in literacy increases when subject area teachers make the reading and writing approaches in each content area clear and visible, following principles of structural functional linguistics.<sup>2</sup>

**Reading and writing play a foundational role in the learning of math, science, and social studies and in the successful completion of high school.**

- Only 70 percent of U.S. students graduate within four years of entering high school.
- Compared with their peers worldwide, U.S. high school students rank in the middle or at the "C" level in math, science, and literacy.
- The United States currently spends \$3.7 billion annually on remediation.
- Investments in adolescent literacy can pay for themselves by increasing high school graduation rates, reducing remediation costs, and fostering enhanced learning in all disciplines.<sup>3</sup>

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Altwerger, B., Arya, P., Jin, L., Jordan, N. L., et al. (2004). When research and mandates collide: The challenges and dilemmas of teacher education in the era of NCLB. *English Education*, 36(2), 119–33.
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- <sup>2</sup> Guthrie, J. T., & Humenick, N. M. (2004). Motivating students to read: Evidence for classroom practices that increase reading motivation and achievement. In P. McCardle and V. Chhabra (Eds.), *The voice of evidence in reading research*. Baltimore: Brookes, 329–54.
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- <sup>3</sup> ACT. (2006). *Aligning postsecondary expectations and high school practice: The gap defined: Policy implications of the ACT national curriculum survey results 2005–2006*. Iowa City, IA. Retrieved July 3, 2007, from <http://www.act.org/path/policy/pdf/NationalCurriculumSurvey2006.pdf>
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Prepared by the NCTE James R. Squire Office of Policy Research which offers updates on literacy research with implications for policy decisions that affect teaching and learning. To download this policy recommendation sheet, visit the NCTE website at <http://www.ncte.org/about/issues/action/129561.htm>. For further information, contact Barbara Cambridge at NCTE's Washington, DC, Office ([bcambridge@ncte.org](mailto:bcambridge@ncte.org) or 202-316-6828).