

**TEACHERS TOLD: GET KIDS READING; PROGRAM ALSO COUNTS ON CONTRIBUTIONS FROM PARENTS, COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS AND LIBRARIES; READING PROGRAM UNVEILED FOR TEACHERS**

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Transforming 12,000 Utah schoolchildren who are behind in reading into bookworms by 2000 is the focus of a new statewide literacy initiative that will begin this fall.

But it will take more than Utah's public schoolteachers to do the job, say officials from the State Office of Education, which is spearheading the Youth Reading program along with Gov. Mike Leavitt's Office.

It will take parents, community volunteers, libraries and even pre-school and day-care centers.

The basics of the community-literacy program were presented Thursday to teachers and parents attending the Utah Rural Schools Conference, which has drawn about 500 educators from around the state.

Much of the conference, which concludes today, has focused on helping educators improve how they teach reading and language arts. Students in rural Utah as well as along the Wasatch Front scored poorly in the language-arts area of this year's Stanford Achievement Test.

Educators say that to improve those scores, something has to be done to help students who are not reading as well as they should because of a family situation, a language barrier or a learning disability.

A state assessment given to kindergarten students last fall showed that children enter school with a large disparity in pre-literacy skills, said Bonnie Morgan, curriculum director for the state.

Some children had more than 3,000 hours of literacy when they entered kindergarten due to reading with a parent, playing with alphabet games and puzzles, coloring, going to the zoo or on family trips.

Other children come in with as few as 200 hours, Morgan said, and they usually are the ones who fall behind in reading.

Thus the 12,000 Youth Reading program.

"We need to raise the awareness of literacy and get people to work together, because it really will take everybody," Morgan said.

Julie Barker, the early-childhood-education specialist for the state, will direct the literacy program. She said it will begin this fall with special training for teachers and community members.

Once the 12,000 children have been identified by teachers, they then will work with parents, local libraries and community volunteers to improve the child's skills. The details still are being worked out.

Barker said the state also wants to measure the program's success.

Research shows that until third grade, a child who is having difficulty reading still can catch up to peers through extra tutoring at home and at school. After that age, remediation is not successful in most cases.

Utah's new program, which meets one of President Clinton's education goals of having all children reading well by third grade, is one of two statewide literacy programs that will start this fall.

Leavitt's wife, Jackie Leavitt, will kick off a public-service campaign called "Read to Me" about the importance of families reading to children early in life.

The 12,000 Youth Reading program is just in time for people such as Carolyn Washburn, the school board president in Sevier District, who says she would like to start a community literacy program in her district and is pleased to see the state is leading the way.

Washburn said the illiteracy rate in her central Utah area hovers around 15 percent among adults, which means the children in those homes also are at a high risk.