



# News You Can Use

February 2006

## Focus on Middle/High School Literacy

By Mike Dunn

Over the past ten years, many human and financial resources have focused on improving literacy instruction and achievement for the early elementary child. We can trace this focus to several national reports, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, 1998) and the *Report of the National Reading Panel* (NICHD, 2000). However, in the past year, national attention and discussions have emerged on issues surrounding the improvement of literacy instruction for adolescents. Two of the reports are at the following websites:

*Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy*,  
[www.all4ed.org](http://www.all4ed.org)

*Reading at Risk: How States Can Respond to the Crisis in Adolescent Literacy*,  
[www.nasbe.org](http://www.nasbe.org)

Key points from these reports include:

- Increasing the amount of time devoted for literacy instruction
- Providing explicit comprehension instruction
- Embedding effective instructional principles in content area instruction
- Providing students with a wide range of text material
- Incorporating writing as a way of learning throughout the school day
- Focusing on strategic tutoring for students most in need
- Providing ongoing staff development
- Forming interdisciplinary teams of teachers to discuss student progress and align instruction

Listed below are summaries of two additional reports regarding issues of educating adolescents.

1. The January 2006 ASCD issue of *Education Update*, reports what high school students said when asked about education and schools. Below are student responses' to several questions. I believe you will find them of interest.

The students identified the following as top qualities they expect to find in their school.

- Positive discipline
- A clean and welcoming environment
- Teaching for understanding
- Emotionally nurturing teachers
- An environment that encourages and values creativity

The students also identified key issues in their school. These problems included bullying, discrimination, dispassionate teachers and students, testing as a way of ranking students, grades, and drugs.

**Reflections:** Do you think middle and high schools students in U-46 would identify similar qualities? What would they want for their schools? How would the U-46 middle and high schools address the issues of quality and problems identified in this survey?

2. The Alliance for Excellent Education conducted a survey of 1,200 individuals about the state of high schools in America. Perceptions of the 1,200 individuals suggest the following ideas:

- A key for improving student achievement in all areas is improving achievement in literacy.
- High schools can help poor performing students raise their level of achievement.
- A high school diploma does not ensure that a graduate is prepared for college or workplace training.
- Americans are willing to pay higher taxes to support effective high school reform efforts.

**Reflections:** How do teachers in your school meet the unique literacy needs of your students? How has CRISS training helped content area teachers meet the literacy needs of students in the content areas?