So often when we, whether it be parent, educator or librarian, look at our role in a child’s literacy, our vision is narrow. If we truly are invested in developing literacy in our children we must view ourselves as part of an extensive team. This team is present at home, in school, on weekends and during summer vacation, from their first day in school through adulthood. This team must be present the day that child is born, setting in place the necessary building blocks of literacy. Essential to this design are the parents for they are truly the first teachers of children.

This concept is one that will bind together many wonderful efforts at increasing literacy and make a comprehensive plan to support children through their early preschool years throughout their education with the hope of creating life long readers and learners.

As a mother of two young children and a secondary school teacher in Central Wisconsin, I have had the opportunity to see literacy at many different stages, its development or lack there of. Our high school recently did school-wide testing and found that a significant percent of our students are not reading at grade level and are not ready for post-secondary challenges. We must do better from the beginning and be proactive versus reactive.

This plan for literacy is not one based upon providing rewards for reading or any other external motivator. I strongly believe and assert that the desire to read must be cultivated from within. As a general assertion, strong literacy skills are a product of a supportive home, guidance by trained professionals and access to literacy materials at home, and in schools and libraries. A design for literacy must include effective communication between all institutions that are involved in childhood literacy and learning. As children pass from home and into institutions there must be proper communication to the next level. For example, parents and their newborn who receive a book and information about reading and its importance in the hospital for the first time must have continued communication by other services such as Birth to 3, Head Start, the United Way, as well as daycare providers. All of the people and professionals who have been entrusted the care of children must actively be promoting reading through a literacy-rich environment.
This same notion of the importance of literacy must be carried through the educational system. From kindergarten through graduation, there must be communication between grade level teachers. The Marshfield Public School District currently has professional learning communities (PLC) in place. These PLCs have for last few years been working on refining learning expectations, methods and assessments. The amount and schedule for communication between grade levels has yet to be refined. In addition, there needs to be a continuing focus on reading after the grade school years.

My proposal is one in which there is a consistent group of professionals who will communicate with those engaged in the literacy process as well as funding to provide materials and workshops for parents, community groups, educators and information specialists. This group will be comprised of representatives from the different resource groups as this will facilitate communication. These representatives will share resources and knowledge, communicate with children, parents and schools at all levels. The message must be consistent, reading is essential for success later in life, it helps parents bond with their children and the curiosity it creates stirs the imagination.

**Literacy Commission Representative Group:**

- hospital staff or volunteer
- daycare provider
- Birth to 3 representative
- Head Start representative
- public librarian
- academic librarian
- early childhood educator
- United Way volunteer
- representative from elementary schools
- representative from middle school
- representative from high school
- representative from university and technical college
- business representatives
- parent groups
- Youth Net volunteer

This concept mirrors an ongoing body of work found in the United Kingdom. As a source of inspiration the National Literacy Trust of the United Kingdom, http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/projects_networks, has an extensive list of projects and programs focused on developing a passion for reading, communicating to disadvantaged families and their children the importance of reading to their future, focus on the literacy of boys, and the development of communication skills in conjunction with literacy. This Trust is evident at all levels and throughout the communities. Their home page can be found on the above tab, National Literacy Trust.
Each of these representatives will inform the commission about their goals, resources and areas of influence. The members will assess and create common goals, share resources when applicable, analyze and evaluate gaps in resources and design a comprehensive plan for literacy influence.

Resources Needed:

- solid working knowledge of the state of literacy in America and literacy within the sphere of influence of the literacy commission
- well chosen and reviewed materials
- extensive variety of materials to encourage literacy in multiple areas of interest and need
- funding for campaign to raise literacy awareness and availability of services - grant writing, fund raising
- trained staff in education and literacy along with volunteers

Of critical importance to this literacy group will be librarians also known as information media specialist, within schools and from the public. Research shows that achievement gaps increase over the summer months and this same research shows that there is a possible correlation to the activities children are engaged in based upon their socioeconomic status. The report as well as statistics outlining this research can be found on the above tab titled NCES. Librarians, academic and public,
should be constantly interacting and collaborating to increase communication about their programs and projects and being supportive to each other. These are not two separate endeavors, but are part of the literacy team. Classroom visits by public librarians and field trips by academic librarians will allow children to see the network of people who are invested in their future.

**Communication**

- early services for infants - continue and expand literature services
- targeting of sectors of population most at risk - lower socioeconomic status, populations with minimal education, parents with no high school diploma, GED or high school diploma, students on free or reduced lunch program
- groups collaborating on literate rich activities - library programs, children's festivals, cultural fairs, science & discovery "museums", local historical society events
- adult or peer led book clubs, after school programs in tutoring
- mentoring, big brothers/big sisters, book buddies
- specific areas of need at the university and technical school levels
- Business visits, shadows or internships to increase awareness of literacy needs beyond high school
- high level awareness of library programs, offerings and services

There is no quick "fix" for literacy. Literacy is built year after year. A well-grounded program will yield results, although it may not be as quick as some would like. Learning is a process, a journey that has many paths, some unforeseen. The vision is a well-networked group of people all communicating and working towards greater literacy for all children.

As my research took me further into the arena of literacy, I realized what a daunting task is ahead of us, whether we are a parent, educator, employer or government official. A DESIGN FOR LITERACY cannot be small in scope, nor timid, we must be bold creative and demand more from all of us.

For more information on the state of our literacy, the impact it has on all aspects of our individual lives and our nation's future, please look at the following report from the National Commission on Adult Literacy.

[www.nationalcommissiononadultliteracy.org/ReachHigherAmerica/ReachHigher.pdf](http://www.nationalcommissiononadultliteracy.org/ReachHigherAmerica/ReachHigher.pdf)