

# Gault, Hile launch Reading Foundation of Licking County

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A disturbing study and the success of a Washington school district led Licking Valley's and Lakewood's superintendents to form a local reading foundation.

Licking Valley Superintendent David Hile cited a book, *The 90% Reading Goal*, which stated that 74 percent of children who had not learned to read at the third-grade level by the time they finished third grade would never read at their grade level.

That statistic shocked Hile and his administrators when they read it, but they were more encouraged after reading *Annual Growth For All Students*, which describes how the Kennewick, Wash., school district had 90 percent of its students

reading at grade level or above in 11 years.

The books were written by Lynn Fielding, Nancy Kerr and Kennewick Superintendent Paul Rosier.

"Those are the two most important books about education I've read," Hile said.

He said that after reading the books and talking with Lakewood Superintendent Jay Gault, he found they had a similar problem: A lot of the children entering kindergarten were not ready to learn to read.

"We identified kids who are coming to school and aren't prepared," Gault said. "It's not all of them, but when we test them as kindergartners, shame on us if we don't help



these parents."

To help the parents, the two districts formed the Reading Foundation of Licking County, which is designed to educate parents on the importance of reading to children.

Hile said students entering kindergarten read either at the level of a 3-year-old or at the second- or third-grade level.

"We found out it's based on their experiences at home and their exposure to reading (pre-kindergarten)," Hile said. "To address or close that achievement gap, we have to get to kids before they get to kindergarten."

Gault said it comes down to 20 minutes a day.

"We can give them the tools, different books, so they (parents) can spend 20 minutes reading to their kids," he said.

During a Feb. 26 parents night at

Hebron Elementary School, Gault said, the district distributed donated books and talked to parents about the importance of reading to their children.

Hile said that through third grade, children should learn to read. After third grade, they should begin reading to learn.

"If a child can't read, they can't learn anything else," he said.

Hile said this is not a new problem: Educators have seen this illiteracy for several decades. He said the Reading Foundation of Licking County wants to address the problem.

The foundation will be a part of the National Children's Reading



Foundation, which formed after *Annual Growth For All Students* was published.

The group forming the Reading Foundation of Licking County met Feb. 19 and chose Tom Slater, retired North Fork Local Schools superintendent, as the foundation's executive director. Ashley Wade is the board president, and Hile said the board comprises 31 members who are determined to make the foundation work.

"We're excited about the idea of having to communicate this message to the people," he said.

It's a message foundation members need to spread, he said. Hile said other school districts are invited to participate.

"We want kids to be prepared for school," Gault said. "We're here to help kids."

For more information on the foundation, call either the Licking Valley or Lakewood district office.