

So What?

Why ACTG is Significant and Newsworthy

During the first three years of school, children learn to read; in later years, they read to learn. Unlike spoken language, reading is a skill that cannot be learned through simple observation and imitation—it is a complex neurological operation that involves multiple areas of the brain, and the mastery of five challenging components: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Thus, when a young student fails to learn proper reading skills, it is highly probable that he or she will fall behind in school and struggle later in life. In fact, the National Research Council conducted a comprehensive study and determined that a student's reading ability at the end of third grade strongly correlates with future academic success. In addition, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, published by the National Center for Education Statistics, reported in 2009 that 68% of the country's fourth graders do not read at a level of proficiency. This strongly suggests that a life of pain and frustration is awaiting two-thirds of our nation's children.

In an increasingly technological world, no longer can an illiterate individual find employment. Computers and machinery have taken over the positions that, in years past, were available to those who could not read. This cultural shift demands an increase in resources and quality instruction; however, before children learn to read, they must be physiologically and neurologically prepared. Over the past decade, the public has become more greatly concerned with this issue of "school readiness." The Minnesota Department of Education responded, in 2002, with its first statewide evaluation of early education entitled, "Minnesota School Readiness Study: Developmental Assessment at Kindergarten Entrance." It repeated the study recently by randomly selecting ten percent (96) of Minnesota schools with entering kindergartners for the 2009-10 school year—a total of 6,310 children. The results show that more than half of the kindergartners are "not proficient" in the following categories: personal and social development, mathematical thinking, the arts, and language and literacy.

No longer can it be assumed that children are fully prepared to learn when they enter kindergarten. When approximately half of the young students starting school do not possess the physiological and neurological maturity for an academic environment, teachers need the tools to adapt. They must rethink their current methods and adjust to the students' needs. The traditional lecture mode, which revolves around time schedules and standardized tests, requires young, energetic children to sit still in desks and listen for most of the day. Research shows that this is not the most effective means of instruction.

A Chance To Grow (ACTG) promotes individual skill development and learning through movement—it refuses to believe that repeating the same instructional practices will produce different results. ACTG recognizes that young students struggle in school for many reasons and it is a painfully distressing situation for the child and his or her family. The programs and services offered by the agency are brain-centered and activity-based. From its inception in 1982, ACTG has given hope to families with brain-injured children through interventions specially designed to teach healthy brain cells to compensate for damaged ones. Today, the agency is a professionally staffed educational, therapeutic, and rehabilitative organization that has expanded its efforts to help *all*

children, particularly those in poverty, who suffer from learning disorders and developmental delays.

Research continues to show that children who enter school with strong readiness skills and achieve early academic success are more likely to enjoy school and make steady progress. Unfortunately, in a world dominated by television, computers, and video games, more children are entering school with poor readiness skills. They have not been exposed to natural elements outdoors, nor received the multi-sensory brain stimulation that is necessary for healthy neurological development. Even the heightened restrictions on car seats, rising popularity of stationary swings, and declining use of playground equipment are recent changes designed to improve child safety, but actually inhibit movement and contribute to the growing number of young students who have trouble learning in the classroom.

A Chance To Grow's interventions were developed by professional therapists to stimulate the brain and establish physiological and neurological maturity. Its educational, therapeutic, and rehabilitative services help prepare today's students, who are expected to learn more information at a younger age. ACTG understands that no child chooses to fail. Those who struggle simply have not been given a chance to grow—we exist to provide that opportunity.