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## Panel focuses on ways to improve pupils' reading

### Literacy is the key to success, 100 told at Fresno meeting.

By **Christina Vance / The Fresno Bee**  
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Here's a word problem for you: 75% of third-grade students in the Fresno Unified School District aren't proficient readers.

That problem -- and solutions to it -- drove a Monday night panel discussion of five Fresno educators sponsored by Fresno Citizens for Good Government.

Roughly 100 people attended the meeting in Hoover High School's cafeteria to hear the speakers and ask questions.

The speakers agreed that improving literacy can happen in many ways: through quality teaching, using testing as a tool, exposing children to reading early and holding a conviction that each student can learn.

Parental and community support is huge, said ReadFresno's new director, Dorothy Powell. ReadFresno recruits volunteers to read to children to assist teachers.

"Children learn to read through their ears," she said. "The ears prepare the brain for reading."

Ericson Elementary teacher Charlie Reynolds said he can't dwell on the fact that some of his students weren't read to at home -- or on their poverty or lack of fluency in English. Instead, he focuses on what he can do.

He described one of his students who improved in reading and gained self-confidence through the school year.

"He struggled with reading, but he was still a very bright boy," he said.

Years ago, Fresno Unified Superintendent Michael Hanson said he taught adult education in a California prison. He said he is haunted by the damage a lack of literacy did to the inmates' lives.

"I saw with my own eyes and heard in their voices what it is to not be able to read," he said.

Every Fresnan should be concerned about teacher shortages, said Larry Moore, president of the Fresno Teachers Association. He said there already is a need for science, math and special education instructors, and those numbers will only get worse with impending retirements. He said 417 district teachers are age 60 or older. There are about 4,000 classroom teachers in the district.

"Draw a circle around a classroom because that's what's important," he said. "It begins with the teacher."

Don Wise, an education professor at California State University, Fresno, said educational leadership remains another important ingredient in boosting literacy.

But, he said, there is one thing that takes precedence over everything else: "We talk about research, but this is all about kids."

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