

CONTACT

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Karin Pouw

(323) 960-3500

mediarelations@churchofscientology.net

Church of Scientology Hosts Conference to Reverse Alarming Reading Trends

An ad hoc group of Pinellas County, Florida, educators met to discuss the literacy crisis and propose action to reverse plummeting reading scores.

The Church of Scientology hosted a conference of professional and volunteer Pinellas County women educators at the Fort Harrison Hotel March 9, to coordinate action to reverse alarming trends in literacy. Those attending reviewed statistics showing literacy has declined throughout the United States for the last century.

A nationwide survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2003 found 14 percent of the American adult population functionally illiterate, with a full 40 percent reading at or below basic levels of proficiency.

The State of Florida, and Pinellas County in particular, face serious challenges. According to NCES, 70 percent of Florida 8th grade students test below proficiency in reading skills. In May 2012, Florida education officials reported nearly half the state's high school students failed the reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). And the Schott Foundation for

Public Education found the Pinellas County School District to have the nation's lowest graduation rate of African-American males in 2010—only 21 percent of those enrolled went on to graduate.

There is also a direct relationship between illiteracy and crime. The 2003 NCES survey found 60 percent of adults in the U.S. prison system read at or below fourth grade reading level, and 85 percent of U.S. juvenile inmates are functionally illiterate.

The educators who meet at the Fort Harrison, including elementary and high school teachers, tutors and private school directors, discussed teaching methods introduced in the early 1900s and the 1950s. The teaching of reading through phonics was replaced by an experimental reading system known as the "whole word" method. Although this method's failure was exposed in 1955 by Rudolf Flesch's bestselling book, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, the system continued as the "accepted method" of teaching reading until the 1990s when the equally flawed "whole language" reading method was introduced.

In 1997, the U.S. Congress requested formation of the Federal National Reading Panel to assess the effectiveness of various approaches to teach children to read. The Panel examined hundreds of studies and in 2000 determined that the centuries-old method of phonics-based instruction was the most successful method of teaching reading. In 2006, the National Council of Teacher Quality (NCTQ) concurred, finding the five science-based components of effective reading to be phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

The NCQT randomly selected a sample of 72 higher education institutions that house elementary education programs and found only 11 of the 72 (15 percent) actually teach these components. It concluded, "Most education schools are not teaching the science of reading."

The Pinellas County educators attending the March 9 conference resolved to reverse reading scores by networking with educators throughout Pinellas County to promote science-based methods to teach young people to read.

Church of Scientology Public Affairs Director Pat Harney hosted the event and presented each participant with *Scientology: How We Help—Applied Scholastics, Achieving Literacy and Education*, which describes the effective education training available through the Applied Scholastics program. The brochure is one of a series of publications published to meet requests for more information about the Scientology religion and its support of global humanitarian initiatives and social betterment programs. For more information, visit the Scientology website at www.scientology.org/AppliedScholastics.

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Applied Scholastics International is a secular nonprofit public benefit corporation that addresses head-on the problem of illiteracy by making L. Ron Hubbard's discoveries in the field of education and literacy broadly available. It has trained nearly 140,000 educators and has helped more than 39 million with Study Technology. The organization works with hundreds of affiliated schools and educational programs throughout the world, providing the effective learning tools developed by L. Ron Hubbard.



Scientology Public Affairs Director Pat Harney (center) presented Pinellas County, Florida, educators with *Scientology: How We Help—Applied Scholastics, Achieving Literacy and Education* at a conference at the Fort Harrison Hotel March 9, 2013.