



## **Reading Seed Center**

**Sponsored by Rotary Club of Tucson**  
*Helping kids learn to read so they can read to learn*

### **Need for the Project**

Nationally, about 40% of fourth grade students are reading below grade level. In some schools in Pima County that number approaches 60%.

Without basic reading skills, children fall farther and farther behind in their learning in all subjects, until many feel so unsuccessful that they eventually drop out. In fact, Arizona has the highest drop out rate in the nation. It's estimated that 90% of those who drop out of high school are reading below grade level, and 50% of all high school students cannot read at grade level.

While illiteracy is a relatively unseen problem, it profoundly impacts our society. U.S. Department of Education statistics reveal that 60% of prison inmates are illiterate and 85% of all juvenile offenders having reading problems. Illiteracy leads to low self-esteem, unemployment, poverty and crime. Nationally, \$5 billion a year is spent on welfare and unemployment compensation due to illiteracy.

Illiteracy begins early in the primary grades. Kindergarten through third grade is a critical time in the development of a child's lifelong literacy. During these years, children learn to read. From fourth grade on, children are reading to learn.

According to Jim Trelease, a well-known advocate for reading aloud to children, "students who read the most, read the best, achieve the most and stay in school the longest." This is true regardless of the sex, race, nationality or socioeconomic background of the student as borne out in 25 years of research.

Research shows and literacy experts agree that if children can read on grade level by the end of third grade, the chances for continuing their education successfully increase dramatically. Schools are not equipped to provide the one-on-one assistance needed to help all children read at grade level. Also, many underperforming students come homes where reading is not encouraged because of a number of factors, including parents' illiteracy, two working parents or single parents with insufficient time to spend helping their children, and poverty.

To determine the number of children affected in Pima County, David Baker, Ph.D., associate superintendent of Flowing Wells School District was consulted. He estimates that about 6,000 students in Pima County in grades one through three are reading below grade level.