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SUNDAY

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Reading ruckus: kids in the middle

Bruce McClelland, The Arizona Daily Star
Steve Goss looks on as his son, Trevor, 10, works on a science project on the family's computer. Goss is an advocate of phonics instruction.

Battle is phonics vs. whole language

By Sarah Tully Tapia
The Arizona Daily Star

Educators and parents have the same goal — to teach children to read.

But the way to reach that goal is causing a stir in Arizona and nationally.

Some prefer the more traditional method of phonics, which stresses letter-sound relationships and the combination of different letter sounds. Through phonics, children learn to identify unfamiliar words by dissecting them and blending sounds together.

Others endorse whole language, which is alternately described as a reading instruction method, a philosophy and pedagogy. It is based on the belief that children learn to read in the same way they learn to speak — by absorbing and imitating language.

Through whole language, children learn to read by recognizing whole words. Students are encouraged to write often, letting ideas flow without being stifled by worries about correct spelling.

While phonics supporters say students will never learn to read and spell well without first mastering the rules of phonetics, whole-language advocates claim that countless worksheets and rote drills can dampen

See **READING,** Page 11A

Love of Reading

As part of the Star's "Love of Reading" month coverage, our team of education reporters takes a look at how children are learning to read.

Sarah Prall, The Arizona Daily Star
Sarah Olbert, a first-grader at Walker Elementary School, composes a sentence based on a word from a story read to the class

Teachers lean to 'eclectic' in developing reading skills

By Monica Mendoza
The Arizona Daily Star

Tucson teachers say they use a combination of whole-language and phonics reading strategies in the classroom.

Local districts have outlined language arts curriculums that aim for a balance of the two methods of reading instruction instead of advocating one method over the other.

But how teachers get little Suzi and Johnny from the point of holding a book correctly to reading and comprehending fiction and non-fiction at their grade level varies from district to district, from school to school and from class to class.

"The first thing parents want to know is, 'Are you a whole-language school or not?' " said Marta Gunderson, K-5 curriculum coordinator for Catalina Foothills Public Schools.

> "The first thing parents want to know is, 'Are you a whole-language school or not?' "
> **Marta Gunderson**
> **Catalina Foothills Public Schools**

The answer is not simple.

Educators, who a decade ago declared whole language as the definitive way to teach reading, now say they realize the importance of phonics. But many are not ready to return completely to drill sheets and spelling lists.

Likewise, teachers who long followed a pure phonics reading program say the broader approach to reading has its merits.

"The new view is more eclectic," said Oliva Schaad, director of elementary curriculum for Sunnyside Unified School District. "It takes the best of the practices."

The Education Commission of the States defines phonics as the focus on letter-sound relationships and the combination of different letter sounds. Through phonics, children dissect unfamiliar words and then blend the isolated sounds together to make a recognizable word.

Whole language, according to the commission, is

See **STRATEGIES,** Page 11A

Blood substitute about to get emergency room test

By Donna Shaw
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

ALLENTOWN, Pa. — Any day now, a bleeding, severely injured patient will be whisked into Lehigh Valley Hospital and enter the emergency room and medical history.

Unconscious and close to death, the patient will receive an experimental blood substitute that doctors hope will save many lives.

Scientists have been trying for decades to develop artificial blood with little success until recently. Now, Lehigh Valley has been chosen as the first hospital in the nation to administer such a product to a trauma patient without the patient's consent.

It will mark what researchers believe is the first time, under new government rules, that an unapproved medicine is administered to someone who is near death and unable to agree to the treatment.

The new policy, which became effective in November, allows emergency-room physicians to use "promising experimental drugs and medical devices" only in patients in life-threatening situations. It has the endorsement of a broad range of scientific, industry, medical-ethics and patient organizations.

The theory is that the policy makes cutting-edge therapies available to people who probably would want and benefit from them if they could give informed consent. The groups say it sets out clear rules that provide more, not less, protection for patients.

Not everyone agrees. The critics range from minority groups who are fearful they will be targets of experiment-happy scientists to suicide doctor Jack Kevorkian.

In an opinion article published last week, Kevorkian compared the new policy to Nazi atrocities. "What we have just taken is a fast ride down the slippery slope, right to the absolute depths," he wrote.

Food and Drug Administration officials say such rhetoric is a gross distortion.

"I know there are some people ... who look at this as a loosening of the rules," said FDA spokesman Don McLearn. "We don't look at it this way."

In fact, emergency-room research conducted on unconscious patients is not new. Many

See **BLOOD,** Page 16A

Buyers' groups are studied for HMOs

Businesses seek more clout on care

By Jane Erikson
The Arizona Daily Star

They demanded lower health care costs and they got them.

Now, the business and government leaders whose demands helped bring about the managed care revolution in this country are asking for more.

They want more doctors to choose from, fewer hoops to jump through to get to specialists, shorter waits for appointments and the freedom to fill a prescription for the drug their doctor thinks they should have — not some cheaper substitute prescribed by their HMO.

In short, they want more *quality* health care, along with lower health care bills.

To achieve their goal, business and government leaders are adopting a strength-in-numbers strategy, building "health care buyers' groups" of private businesses, government agencies or both.

The new groups are following the lead of established organizations such as the Buyers Health Care Action Group in Minneapolis and CalPERS, the California Public Employees Retirement System.

These groups bring together dozens of employers who wield enough bargaining power to demand more quality from HMOs, physician groups and other plans, while still holding down premiums and other costs.

The number of health care buyers' groups nationally has escalated from about 40 in 1993 to 102 today, said Sean Sullivan, president of the National Business Coalition on Health in Washington, D.C.

"It's definitely a trend," Sullivan said last week, "and quality is the theme — quality and value, which incorporates cost controls with quality of care."

One of the newer and smaller groups sprang up four years ago

See **HMOs,** Page 6A

4 more teens are released from custody

By Jon Burstein
The Arizona Daily Star

The state Department of Juvenile Corrections released four more youths from Phoenix facilities yesterday in its attempt to comply with a court-ordered population cap.

Thirteen youth offenders have been released from two juvenile correctional facilities this weekend as a result of a federal court order issued Friday, said Steve Meissner, a juvenile corrections spokesman.

Two teens were released from Adobe Mountain School and two more from Black Canyon School yesterday, following the nine let out Friday from Adobe, he said.

With the releases, 703 youths are left in the juvenile system, 51 above the 652-youth limit imposed by U.S. District Judge Richard Bilby, Meissner said.

The youths let out this weekend from Adobe were convicted of charges ranging from attempted criminal damage to aggravated robbery, Meissner said.

See **RELEASED,** Page 14A

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WEATHER

Will we hit 80? Today is expected to be partly sunny and warm, breezy in the morning with east to southeast winds of 10 to 20 mph, gusting to 30 mph. Look for a high in the upper 70s, low in the mid-40s. **Details on Page 17A.**

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