



In 1996, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley issued a call for greater attention to the essential skill of reading following the release of a report that confirmed American students' reading skills were not improving. "Our first challenge is to get America reading again," said Riley. "A young person who cannot read is placed at an extraordinary disadvantage. And in far too many cases, these are the very young people who start down the road to truancy, giving up, and eventually dropping out."

The next year, a small reading task force at NEA came to a similar conclusion after receiving a plea from a teacher, "Help me motivate my students to read. Help them see that reading is fun." To the members of the task force, this was a call to action. "Pep rallies are held to get kids excited about football. We assemble to remember that character counts. Why don't we do something to get kids excited about reading? We'll call it NEA's Read Across America, and we'll celebrate it on March 2, Dr. Seuss's birthday."