



Briefing Paper

Reading Recovery® Council of North America

Reading Recovery and IDEA Legislation: Early Intervening Service (EIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI)

Reading Recovery can play an important role in a school's implementation of the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; IDEA). The United States Department of Education (USDE) What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) has verified the effectiveness of Reading Recovery based on scientific research (www.whatworks.ed.gov). That means Reading Recovery is a compelling option for schools that are designing response to intervention (RTI) models to meet the needs of struggling readers and writers.

Reading Recovery deserves the attention of administrators and policymakers at local, state, and national levels who are charged with

- ensuring early identification and early intervention for *all* children struggling with literacy learning.
- providing a way to appropriately identify children with learning disabilities (LD).
- providing effective, intensive, evidence-based early intervening services.
- ensuring monitoring of student progress and data-based documentation for each student.
- reporting annual yearly progress which documents the accelerated growth of struggling readers.
- providing the highest quality of professional development for teachers of low achievers.
- creating a multi-tiered problem-solving team to support comprehensive literacy efforts.

Authors

Mary K. Lose
Oakland University

Maribeth C. Schmitt
Purdue University

Francisco X. Gómez-Bellengé
National Data Evaluation Center

Noel K. Jones
University of North Carolina-Wilmington

Barbara A. Honchell
University of North Carolina-Wilmington

Billie J. Askew
Texas Woman's University

The revised IDEA legislation allows the use of response to intervention (RTI) as an alternate method for identifying children with learning disabilities. IDEA 2004 also permits local agencies to use funds for early intervening services (EIS) (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). These changes in the law offer ways for districts to respond to rising LD enrollments.

Response to intervention encourages early identification and pre-referral intervention to determine if a child responds to the intervening instruction. The goal is to limit referrals based on inadequate instruction or limited English proficiency and to reduce the number of children identified for LD services. Reduction of referrals and placements yields major cost savings to the education system.

Early intervening services are intended to reduce referrals that could have been avoided by regular educational interventions. Under IDEA, school districts may use as much as 15% of special education monies to pay for qualifying early intervening services, including professional development for teachers. Early intervening services are required in local education agencies where special education referrals are significantly disproportionate based on race or ethnicity.

The USDE does not require or endorse any particular model of RTI or EIS. State education agencies establish the criteria for identifying children with specific learning disabilities, and that criteria must permit local agencies to choose an RTI model. The options described above allow local school administrators to consider Reading Recovery as an EIS or RTI (Lose, 2005).

Using Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura¹ within IDEA

Reading Recovery is a highly effective short-term intervention of one-to-one tutoring for low-achieving first graders (www.readingrecovery.org). Students receive a half-hour lesson each school day for 12 to 20 weeks with a specially trained Reading Recovery teacher. As soon as students meet grade-level expectations and demonstrate that they can continue to make progress in the classroom, their lessons are discontinued and new students begin individual instruction.

Although state education agencies have authority in directing the use of IDEA funds, local education agencies can influence state decisions by presenting alternatives that meet the intent of the legislation. Three ways to include Reading Recovery within the constructs of the IDEA legislation are suggested below.

1 Reading Recovery as a Pre-Referral Intervention—EIS and RTI

For more than 20 years, Reading Recovery has successfully served as a pre-referral intervention for more than 1.6 million children in the United States (www.readingrecovery.org; www.ndec.us). Reading Recovery demonstrates the two positive outcomes (see Jones, Johnson, Schwartz, & Zalud, 2005) envisioned by IDEA legislation, specifically response to intervention:

Positive Outcome One

The child demonstrates grade-level performance as a result of the response to intervention and is not referred and placed in LD reading or writing. The child continues to achieve with high-quality classroom instruction. Across the United States, 75% of children who complete the Reading Recovery intervention achieve this outcome.

Positive Outcome Two

The child makes progress but does not reach grade-level standards. Across the United States, 25% of children with complete Reading Recovery interventions fall into this category. A team of educators in the school determines the next positive actions for the child, aided by information gathered during Reading Recovery lessons.

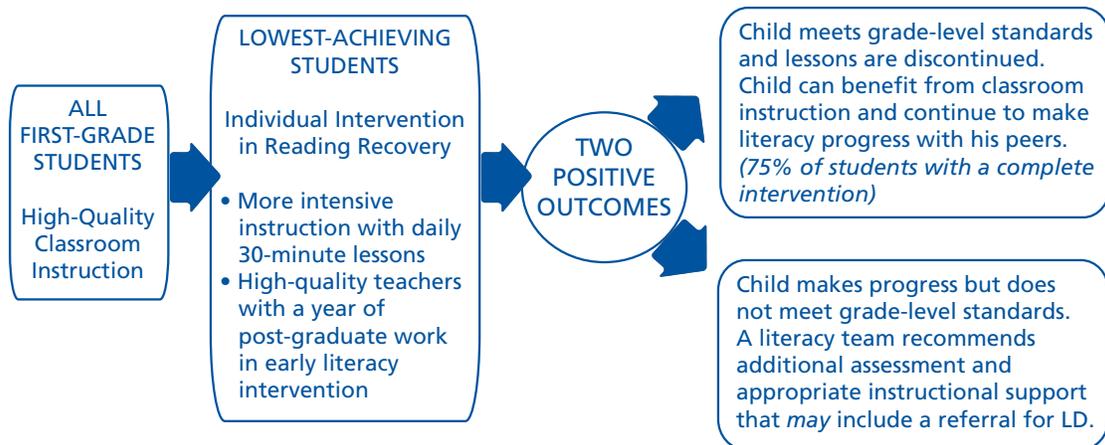
Both outcomes of the RTI model proposed in Figure 1 are positive because they benefit the child and the school. National data for 2005–2006 show that only 1% of the first graders with complete Reading Recovery interventions were placed in LD reading or writing at the end of Grade 1 (National Data Evaluation Center, 2006).

The RTI model in Figure 1 is based on *planned prevention*, with classroom instruction as the primary intervention and Reading Recovery as the secondary intervention. Reading Recovery provides an intensive intervention as soon as problems are detected — before difficulties become habituated and difficult to change. Children are identified in Grade 1; they are taught by Reading Recovery teachers with high levels of expertise in working with children who struggle with literacy learning.

Intensive intervention needs to be *individually designed* and *individually delivered* for children to quickly catch up with their peers. In the same way that a medical diagnosis is rendered individually, only one-to-one teaching can both identify a reader's individual difficulties and work on specific strengths. Although some researchers claim that small groups

¹Descubriendo la Lectura, Reading Recovery in Spanish, is available for first-grade children whose classroom literacy instruction is in Spanish.

Figure 1 **Reading Recovery as Part of a Response to Intervention (RTI) Model: Meeting the Needs of All First Graders**



achieve the same outcomes, many studies on which these claims are based are flawed (see Schmitt, Askew, Fountas, Lyons, & Pinnell, 2005, pp. 76–77; Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2006).

Evidence favoring one-to-one interventions is strong. The USDE Institute of Education Sciences identified one-to-one tutoring by qualified tutors in Grades 1–3 as meeting the gold standard of research, meaning outcomes found to be effective in randomized controlled trials (Institute of Education Sciences, 2003, p. iii). Many other researchers have documented the importance of individual lessons for the lowest achievers at the onset of schooling (Pinnell, Lyons, DeFord, Bryk, & Seltzer, 1994; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Vellutino, Scanlon, Sipay, Small, & Pratt, 1996; Wasik & Slavin, 1993).

2 Reading Recovery Professionals as Part of a Comprehensive Literacy Team

Reading Recovery professionals also support the 2004 IDEA legislation by working within a multi-tiered problem-solving approach. They work as members of a school team to solve literacy problems in the early grades. Team members include classroom teachers, LD teachers, Reading Recovery teachers, administrators, and other appropriate personnel. Through collegial communication, the team ensures that students' needs are quickly identified and that strategies are formulated to meet those needs.

For example, in the Fort Bend Independent School District in Texas, school teams expand the conversation about Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura students to include classroom teachers and other professionals. Special

education teachers are important team members because the team focuses on all students identified as needing early intervention to ensure they receive needed services. The school literacy team provides a forum for communication, problem solving, and monitoring literacy learning across grade levels using its collective knowledge and experience (Jackson et al., 2004).

The Walled Lake Consolidated Schools in Oakland County, Michigan, implemented their own version of RTI, the Seamless Support model, with Reading Recovery teachers as part of a collaborative effort among principals, counselors, general educators, special education teachers, and ESL staff. Reading Recovery, classroom, and special education teachers work together and share their students. Now fully functioning, the Seamless Support model is yielding good results. By every measure, including standardized tests and state assessments, students are referred less frequently and teacher feedback is positive (Bell, 2005).

3 Reading Recovery as Professional Development to Build Capacity

Intensive and ongoing professional development of teachers is a hallmark of Reading Recovery. A teacher trained in Reading Recovery is highly skilled and, in a one-to-one response to intervention setting, can make teaching decisions based on each child's strengths as the starting point for daily instruction (McEneaney, Lose, & Schwartz, 2006).

This type of skilled instruction requires exemplary ongoing professional development because teachers, not programs, teach children. The lowest-performing, most at-risk children deserve the most-expert, skilled teachers.

School districts across the United States have chosen Reading Recovery's high-quality professional development model to help the most-vulnerable literacy learners. The following examples illustrate how some districts have used Reading Recovery professional development to support struggling readers and to build teacher expertise:

- Reading Recovery teachers use their skills to provide one-to-one instruction so that children can reach grade-level performance in reading and writing, reducing referrals to special education and other long-term services. For part of the day, most Reading Recovery teachers also work with children in classrooms or groups, thus contributing broadly to the school program.
- Special education teachers are given two assignments: Reading Recovery for half of the school day and LD for the remainder of the day. These teachers complete the regular Reading Recovery training and continue to work in a split assignment in subsequent years. They participate in ongoing Reading Recovery professional development and use their expertise with all children served.
- Special education teachers complete the yearlong Reading Recovery training (with released time for Reading Recovery teaching during the training year). After the full year of training, these teachers may return to full-time special education roles, using their sound foundation in literacy teaching and learning to benefit all the children they serve.

The influence of Reading Recovery professional development builds capacity for literacy expertise and leadership in general education and special education.

A comprehensive literacy effort in the Adel-Desoto-Minburn School District (ADM) in Iowa has yielded positive results for children. The plan included Reading Recovery implementation, a classroom literacy initiative, reconfiguration of the Title I reading program, and a commitment to train special education teachers in Reading Recovery. Although the trained special education teachers do not continue as Reading Recovery teachers, the professional development enables them to provide high-quality reading instruction for students ultimately placed in special education interventions. All stakeholders work as a team on behalf of children struggling with literacy learning.

What Can Administrators and Policymakers Do?

Make a plan to include or expand Reading Recovery in the response to intervention model in your schools. If necessary, work with officials at the state department/agency to make your case. Use the following rationales to support the importance of Reading Recovery as a key component of your plan.

Implementation of Reading Recovery provides

- a cost-effective investment in the prevention of literacy failure for first graders, reducing long-term costs of educating struggling learners and allowing special education resources to be allocated on the basis of highest need.
- a scientific, research-based intervention (Schmitt et al., 2005).
- high-quality professional development for the teachers of the lowest achievers (yearlong intensive course work).
- a multi-tiered problem-solving approach to literacy learning, involving a comprehensive team and close collaboration between general and special education.
- a valid and reliable assessment for early identification of children with literacy difficulties (Clay, 2002, 2006).
- a short-term (12–20 weeks) intensive one-to-one intervention with documented evidence of its effectiveness (www.ndec.us ; Schmitt et al., 2005).
- an intensive period of diagnostic teaching to inform the school team as they make recommendations based on the needs of each child.
- systematic monitoring of each child's progress and national reporting of outcomes for every child served (www.ndec.us).
- a reduction of the achievement gap for low-achieving children, for minority and low-income children, and children who are English language learners (Kelly, Gómez-Bellengé, Chen, & Schulz, 2005; Neal & Kelly, 1999; Rodgers, Gómez-Bellengé, Wang, & Schulz, 2005).
- a systematic framework that includes standards for effective implementation and ongoing support from a network of Reading Recovery professionals at universities across the United States.

The passage of IDEA with the promise of response to intervention (RTI) expands the role of Reading Recovery in

Reading Recovery Facts and Figures

- Approximately 75% of the children with complete Reading Recovery interventions in the United States reach grade-level expectations (Gómez-Bellengé & Rodgers, 2006).
- National data for the 2005–2006 school year revealed that only 1% of the 72,132 children who completed Reading Recovery interventions were placed in LD reading at the end of Grade 1 (National Data Evaluation Center, 2006).
- A large-scale study in New York found that children with a complete Reading Recovery intervention had significantly lower referral rates than a higher achieving comparison group not served by Reading Recovery (O'Connor & Simic, 2002).
- A study in Boston projected special education cost savings for children who successfully completed Reading Recovery. The researcher found cost savings between \$240,000 and \$1,110,000 after factoring in the cost of the Reading Recovery intervention (Bueker, 2004).
- In a study of urban children in New Jersey, Reading Recovery was found to reduce the achievement gap of disadvantaged urban children (Batten, 2004).
- Reading Recovery reduces the achievement gap between African American and White children and between poor and middle-class children, respectively (Rodgers, Gómez-Bellengé, Wang, & Schulz, 2005).

schools. The key to literacy success is embedded within a comprehensive plan that includes Reading Recovery for the most-vulnerable first graders.

When professionals and parents work together on behalf of the lowest-literacy achievers in Grade 1, everyone benefits — children and their families, teachers, schools, and the community. By including Reading Recovery in your planning, you can ensure early success that will make a difference for children.

For more information about Reading Recovery, contact the Reading Recovery Council of North America (RRCNA) or visit their website at www.readingrecovery.org.

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Essential Information

1. Reading Recovery's effectiveness with at-risk students is **recognized by the USDE What Works Clearinghouse**, a branch of the Institute of Education Sciences. No other beginning reading intervention has achieved large effect sizes in all four domains evaluated — alphabets, fluency, comprehension, and general reading achievement (www.whatworks.ed.gov). Reading Recovery is based on **scientifically based reading research** (SBRR) and has more than 20 years of evaluation data to support short-term and long-term effectiveness (www.readingrecovery.org, research section).
2. **Assessments** used in Reading Recovery are valid and reliable for identifying the lowest-achieving children and for monitoring their progress.
3. **One-to-one teaching** is economical for at least three reasons: The intervention is short-term; most children continue to make progress with their classmates without needing long-term help; and Reading Recovery teachers' skills are available to many other children in the school setting.
4. **The USDE does not mandate or endorse a particular RTI model** although undocumented claims are made by some agencies to suggest preference for a three-tier model that would prohibit individual instruction. That prohibition does not meet the intent of the legislation and ignores substantial research supporting individual interventions.
5. Reading Recovery is based on a **complex view of the reading process**. Reading Recovery professionals acknowledge the importance of the phonological aspects of learning to read; they attend to letters, sounds, and words. Relying on a single factor in literacy instruction, however, cannot meet the needs of all children, especially those who are struggling with literacy learning (NICHD, 2000). Learning to read is a complex process that requires a skilled and knowledgeable teacher who makes decisions about appropriate teaching moves for **each individual child**.
6. Reading Recovery **reduces the gap** between low achievers and their average classmates; reduces the gap between African American and White children and poor and middle class students; reduces the achievement gap of disadvantaged urban children; and yields positive benefits for non-native English speakers.

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