

Iowa State Representative Tells Her Son's Success Story

Vicki Lensing, Reading Recovery Parent, Iowa State Representative

I first learned of Reading Recovery in 1992 when Nick, my youngest son, entered first grade. His teacher approached me about a new program that might help his reading skills.

She tried to explain what Reading Recovery was and how it would help Nick, and she suggested I visit with the Reading Recovery teacher for more information. I tried to understand how this would be helpful for him while at the same time feeling guilty that Nick's skills were so far behind. His father and I reflected, wondering whether what we had done or not done figured into his not being able to read as well as his siblings could at that age or as his classmates could now.

We came to the conclusion that for whatever reason, Nick needed help to bring his skills up to the level necessary for him to be successful as a student. We visited with the Reading Recovery teacher, and she shared that

while this was a new program, it had good success rates.

As parents, we were hoping to talk to other parents whose children had gone through Reading Recovery and hear their comments, that this was the right thing to do and receive some reassurance that Nick would not be stigmatized by being in Reading Recovery, but because the program was so new, he was among the first students to go through it. Even his classroom teacher didn't know a lot about it. I remembered from my childhood the children in my class who had to go to special reading and how everyone knew they needed help.

Parental remorse kicked in again: Nick had just gotten glasses which was fairly traumatic, and now we were placing him in a special program. But the Reading Recovery teacher kept reassuring us that this would be very beneficial for Nick and that we would be able to participate and see the progress he made. So Nick began Reading Recovery. And we saw him learn and grow—and read.

Today, Nick is a freshman in college. He is a good student, and I attribute his success in high school and college to Reading Recovery. Had he not gotten the strong foundation in his reading skills in first grade, he would not have been able to achieve the skills and confidence necessary to continue in his academic or his personal life.

This personal experience with Reading Recovery has made me a strong advocate, especially in my current role as a state legislator. I support



Nick Lensing, high school graduate.

this program and its growth statewide. Facing the challenges of budget cuts and funding issues makes it difficult for programs like Reading Recovery, but if children do not get a solid foundation in reading early on, they will continue to struggle throughout school and later life.

As a legislator, I get the opportunity to go back to schools and visit Reading Recovery sessions. I get to watch children read and excel. I see their pride and confidence. It is imperative that children continue to have the opportunity to participate in Reading Recovery. It made the difference for my son, and I know how powerful that can be. I am proud to know that he is a Reading Recovery graduate.



Nick Lensing, first grade.

Where Are They Now?

Saul's Story: A Motivated Learner Soars to Academic Heights

Paula Dugger, Reading Recovery Teacher

Irving Independent School District, Irving, Texas



When he began his series of lessons in August 2000, Saul was reading below Level 1. His elementary school principal remembers him as a quiet boy who was a hard worker and very willing to learn.

Saul Membreno has faced a number of challenges in his young life, and through hard work and high aspirations he has conquered each one. This determined young man has also benefited from the support of his family.

Now in the seventh grade, he loves getting good grades and already knows that he wants to be a lawyer someday. His mother, Maria Membreno, tells him, "You can do it, because with good grades you can go on to the university and get a good education and do well in life."

After attending a bilingual pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, Saul was an English language learner (ELL) student when he entered the Reading Recovery program at Barton Elementary School in Irving, TX.

"He was a very quiet boy, very observant," remembers Lee Elementary School Principal Maria Elena Coronado, who was then vice principal at Barton. "But he was a very hard worker, and so willing to learn."

When he began his series of lessons in August of 2000, Saul was reading at Text Level B (below a Level 1), and scored a 5 on the Writing Vocabulary task. In terms of stanines, he began

the program with four 1s and two 2s; by the end of his Reading Recovery lessons he had three 7s and three 9s. His Reading Recovery teacher was Paula Dugger, currently the reading coordinator and Reading Recovery teacher leader for the Irving Independent School District in Texas.

"From his early tests, he didn't look like he'd be one of the first to discontinue," Dugger said, "but he was a very smart little boy. He made remarkable progress. He was probably one of the quickest of my students ever to discontinue his lessons."

Even at a young age, Saul was a motivated learner. Coronado noted, "He really put a lot of effort into reading, because he knew it was important. He never gave up."

Saul's parents provided support at home while he worked through the lessons. Coronado said his mother "was always doing whatever she could to help Saul improve. His parents were incredible."

By the fall of that year, Saul had come a long way towards mastering the skill of reading. After just 9 weeks of one-to-one instruction, Saul's lessons were successfully discontinued in October. By Lesson 38, he was reading at Level 12, and scored a 44

on the Writing Vocabulary task. Even after his series of lessons, Saul's progress continued at an accelerated rate. By end-of-year testing in May 2001, his score rose to 63 on the Writing Vocabulary task, and he was reading at Level 20.

"It was a case of the right program for the right kid," Dugger said.

But Saul's successes have not ended there. In second grade he qualified for the Gifted and Talented Program, and in third grade he received the highest rating on his Texas Assessment of Knowledge Skills (TAKS) in reading—"commended." More commended performances on the TAKS exams followed in fifth-grade reading, math and science, and in sixth-grade math and reading. He received a Summa Cum Laude in sixth grade, indicating that his scores were among the highest in the class.

Saul's sixth-grade math teacher, Cheryl Guerin, had this to say: "In class Saul is an active participant, engaged in the lesson and ready to help a struggling classmate. He is always prepared and always ready to move on to the next thing."

Guerin adds that Saul is "a very charismatic leader," and he rises to

the occasion when asked to be a team captain for a class competition. "His easy-going nature and his comfort with students of diverse background and ability make him quietly popular with his classmates," she added.

His father, an engineer originally from El Salvador, passed away 3 years ago, and Saul's older brother abandoned his university education to help support the family. Now Saul's goal is to help his brother finish his interrupted education.

When not hard at work toward this and other goals, Saul plays the viola. He also likes to play basketball in the summertime.

Saul Membreno has successfully combined talent with hard work and is prospering through his school years. From the first grader struggling with learning to read, he has soared to be academically ranked as one of the top 10 students in his sixth-grade class.

His mother is a big supporter of Reading Recovery. "I wish all my kids had had that program," she said. "Any time a teacher offers my children extra help, I take it. I love that program. It gave Saul a love of books."



Ranked as one of the top 10 students in his sixth-grade class, Saul enjoys playing the viola and basketball. His goal is to be a lawyer and help his brother finish the college education that was interrupted by their father's death.

Class of 2006–07 Benjamin Hendel

by Twilah Kaldenberg

Benjamin came to first grade at Grant Elementary in Albia, Iowa, in August 2006. His Observation Survey task scores showed a student who understood that reading is supposed to ‘make sense’ but beyond that, he thought that reading was ‘remembering’ words. As soon as Benjamin realized that learning to read is a process of applying strategic information to solve unknowns, something clicked and he really took off. His lessons were discontinued after 20 weeks of instruction.

Benjamin is now a fourth-grade student in Wisconsin, where he is in his schools’ Talented and Gifted program.

Twilah is a Reading Recovery teacher at Grant Elementary School, Albia, IA

Thoughts from Benjamin’s mom, Nancy Hendel

Benjamin was a quiet and sensitive child. He enjoyed being read to and it was an activity we did often at bedtime. At an early age, Benjamin showed a remarkable ability to ‘memorize’ the books after many repetitions but was not able to translate this memorization to actual reading of words. At the age of 3 we enrolled Benjamin at a day school in Houston. This program focused on beginning letter recognition and phonics. They also introduced penmanship. When we met with Benjamin’s teacher for conferences, we were told that Benjamin was not progressing with the class, but he was a “boy” and would “eventually catch up.” At the age of 4 he was in the same program, but basic words and reading were also introduced. Benjamin struggled with writing his name and was unable to differentiate the letters and correctly name them. The class as a whole had learned 40 basic words throughout the year and Benjamin was able to read 0/40 including the words ‘a’ and ‘I.’ We were growing more anxious as we saw students increasing their skills as Benjamin remained stagnant. Benjamin’s teacher had a background in special education and during our last conference she told us to “keep an eye on him.” She felt it could be that he was a late bloomer, or there could be a learning disability.



Our family moved to Albia, Iowa, just before Benjamin entered kindergarten. Benjamin was very shy and introverted, but we thought it was just due to the move and starting a new school. As Benjamin progressed throughout the year, his reading or ability to recognize letters was slow at best. He excelled at spelling (due to the memorization) but out of the context of a spelling test, he could not read the word he just spelled. By the middle of kindergarten, he still was not able to recognize all the letters in the alphabet. In the Albia school system, the children are ranked according to their ability in certain testing areas. Benjamin continually ranked in the bottom 10% of his class. This was extremely frustrating due to the amount of exposure, time, and repetition we had provided for him at home. I was also concerned that Benjamin was getting frustrated and lost at school, and I wanted him to have a positive experience and an enjoyment of learning.

Benjamin started first grade in the fall of 2006. We received written notice that Benjamin would be in a



In third grade, Benjamin read books 1–5 in the Harry Potter Series and completed written reports on two of them.

program called Reading Recovery. As parents, we had resigned ourselves that Benjamin might always struggle in school and need remedial help. Having never heard of Reading Recovery, we had assumed that this was just for the children in the lower reading group. We were invited to an information night and only by true luck my husband was not working that night and we were both able to attend. I felt like that night was the first light of hope for Benjamin. I felt like the Reading Recovery teachers were truly fighting for Benjamin's right to have the best learning environment to begin to read. We also found out that Benjamin would be partnered with Twilah Kaldenberg as his Reading Recovery teacher, who would later be known as our 'reading angel.' The information meet-

I am a firm believer that had we not been allowed to participate in the wonderful Reading Recovery program, my son would have been lost in the shuffle of the public school system.

ing discussed the methodology of the program, but most importantly, emphasized the crucial need of the involvement of the parents in the success of the program.

Benjamin immediately bonded with Twilah. Her calm manner and soothing approach gave Benjamin the confidence he needed to learn new skills. It was interesting to hear Twilah's initial assessment that Benjamin did not even have the skills to know whether to start reading a page from the bottom or the top or left or right. He phonetically did not know all of his letters and he certainly did not know how to 'stretch' them into a word. He was afraid to try and really leaned on his memorization to get through his assignment.

As parents, our responsibility at home was to complete the homework daily, which coupled with his regular first-grade homework sometimes presented a challenge. But we felt since we had committed to the program, we needed complete assignments no matter how many tears there were.

Then we started to see progress! Benjamin started coming out of his shell after about 6–7 weeks of Reading Recovery. He began reading simple books and was able to

stretch out new words. His comprehension was also making remarkable strides and his confidence was amazing. His bond with Twilah continued to grow and he looked forward to his reading sessions. He moved up to the middle reading group in November and the upper group in February.

Benjamin completed Reading Recovery in January 2007. Though his formal classes were over, Twilah continued to meet with Benjamin sporadically throughout the remainder of his first-grade year and help him utilize his new skills and continue to bolster his confidence.

During the fall of 2007, our family moved to Appleton, Wisconsin. Upon arriving in Appleton, Benjamin was tested for reading and comprehension using the MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) test scores. The child who was in the bottom 10% of his kindergarten class scored in the 99% in reading and comprehension! As parents we were overjoyed at the scores, but mostly we had a child who had the confidence to read and also the love. Due to his high test scores, he was invited to be part of the TAG program (Talented and Gifted) and has flourished. The most telling demonstration of his reading ability was during third grade — Benjamin read books 1–5 in the Harry Potter Series and completed written reports on two of them. He said he was saving book 6 for something "fun" to read over the summer!!

Though it may not be directly related to his reading, Benjamin also finally had the courage and the confidence to become part of the swim team and is enjoying the friendships and team participation it offers. I think his confidence at school has definitely spilled over into his extracurricular activities.

To sum up our story, I am a firm believer that had we not lived in Albia, Iowa, and been allowed to participate in the wonderful Reading Recovery program, my son would have been lost in the shuffle of the public school system. Twilah's devotion to the program and understanding of the intricacies of a child with a difficulty in reading was paramount in Benjamin's success. We are eternally grateful to her patience, her understanding, and her help offered to my son. Words are not enough to accurately describe the work this wonderful teacher is doing and how fortunate this community is to have her on staff.

Grant Covone

University Training Center: Clemson University

Now a 22-year-old electrician's assistant, Patrick (Grant) Covone thanks his Reading Recovery teacher, Jean Hogan, for sparking his ability to overcome reading difficulties. Grant received Reading Recovery lessons in 1993–94 while attending Oakway Elementary in the Oconee County School District in South Carolina.

Grant's mother, Connie, was so impressed by his progress that she became a Reading Recovery teacher — and she's still teaching today at Fair Oak Elementary in the same school district. Connie takes the lead in staff development at her school and was instrumental in introducing the "push in" concept about 4 years ago.

Grant's success paved the way for the success of many other children who have been taught by his mother.



Grant in first grade and at a recent job site

Grant remembers...

I am one of the first graders who was being considered for retention. Orally, I could answer anything Mrs. Floyd asked but independently, I was lost. I was placed in the Reading Recovery program toward the end of first grade. In a matter of weeks, the "light bulb" came on, and things started to make sense. I showed so much improvement that I was promoted to second grade. Over the summer, I got a library card so I could keep reading.

During second grade, I continued to improve in reading but had trouble with written expression. At the end of the year I was tested for another intervention. I came out gifted in reading with a learning disability in written expression.

School was never easy for me, but I am thankful for the teachers that took the extra time and patience to help me be a lifelong learner. If it was not for Reading Recovery, I truly believe I would have gone through life with difficulties in reading as well as writing.

When I was in high school, I had a teacher that involved my class with building a Habitat for Humanities house. I enjoyed the work. After I received my high school diploma, I tried various types of construction work. Today

I am working as an electrician's assistant. I have lots of areas of my job that involve reading — safety regulations, insurance paperwork, directions, blueprints... As an adult, I like to read newspapers and magazines to keep up with current events. I rarely choose to read a novel, but it does not mean I can't. Thanks to Reading Recovery's solid foundation I can read anything—just like mom!!!

Connie remembers...

Patrick Grant Covone is my youngest son. He came into this world nine days late with the umbilical cord around

his neck. The doctor told me that he may have some difficulties learning. He developed normally, so I didn't think anything else about the doctor's warning.

Grant's exposure to books started early. I read nursery rhymes, Bible stories, books about Elmo and the Cookie Monster. Naptime and bedtime were always story time at our house.

As he got a little older, Brer Fox and Brer Rabbit were his favorites. Grant loved all kinds of tales. He never seemed to tire of hearing some of his favorites over and over.

It was a surprise to me that Grant had difficulty learning to read. He knew plenty of things in isolation but could not put it all together. It was a blessing that a spot opened up for Grant to get Reading Recovery in first grade. Within a few weeks, I saw such a change in his reading! He became more confident and more willing to try something he did not know. He was very proud when he could read a book all by himself. The one book I remember him bringing home to read was *Yellow Chick*. He asked to bring it home so often his teacher finally gave it to him!

School was not always easy for Grant, but Reading Recovery made it tolerable for him. Since he became a better reader, it freed him up to concentrate on other areas that he found difficult.

I will be forever grateful that my son got the opportunity to be in the Reading Recovery program. It saved him from a lifetime of frustration in this print-rich world.

submitted by Susan Turner, Reading Recovery Teacher Leader, Oconee County School District, South Carolina





Successful second grader Celayda Mares

Celayda Mares

University Training Center: San Diego State University

Celayda Mares was having great difficulty with early reading and writing as she started first grade. Though she was fluent in speaking both English and Spanish, reading was a challenge. During Reading Recovery lessons with teacher leader Kathy Hall, Celayda made great strides in reading and writing, increasing her text reading by 13 levels in just 12 weeks!

Celayda's second-grade teacher reports that she is working above grade level in many areas, is a strong creative writer, and has "perfected the paragraph." "She likes to set goals and achieve them. Celayda works very hard in my class and I know she will continue to excel," her teacher says.

submitted by Kathy Hall, Reading Recovery Teacher Leader, Washington County School District, Utah

Andres Silva

University Training Center: St. Mary's College

In kindergarten, Andres Silva spoke almost no English, and by first grade was still among the lowest first graders in reading in the Washoe County School District in Reno, Nevada. After less than 20 weeks of Reading Recovery lessons with Reading Recovery teacher Sonia MacDonald (one of the first teachers trained in Reading Recovery in Reno), he was average in reading and writing. Andres maintained his skills and has been an example for his whole family.

Andres' mother, Martha Silva, says the Reading Recovery intervention "gave him the confidence to succeed." In high school, Andres was a good student, a football player, and helped both his sister and mother with schoolwork. At that time Martha had gone back to college to pursue a degree in elementary education. Andres was her study partner, encouraging her as she prepared for final exams and professional tests. After graduation, Martha taught first grade and completed training as a Reading Recovery advocate, sharing many insights of second language learners with her colleagues.

Today, Andres is in his second year of college at University of Nevada-Reno studying criminal justice. Andres' mother, Martha has continued to teach first and second grades and is now pursuing her master's degree in literacy.

submitted by Lynn Jasmine, Reading Recovery Teacher Leader, Washoe County School District, Nevada



College students Andres Silva and his mother, Martha

Where Are They Now?

Cape Cod Site Produces Exemplary Results for Thousands of Students

Carolynne Warren-Stein, Teacher Leader, Cape Cod Training Site, Massachusetts

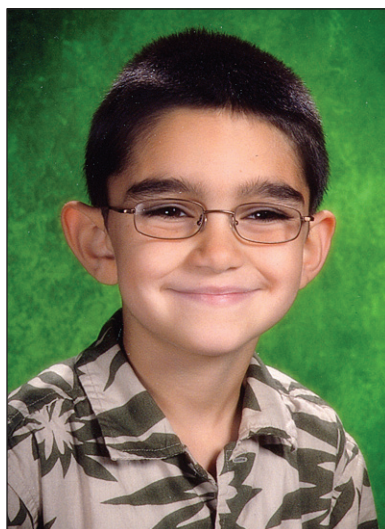
Editor's Note: District administrators in Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District in Massachusetts have provided strong support for the Cape Cod Reading Recovery training site since 1990. The site has trained more than 100 Reading Recovery teachers and served more than 3,000 Reading Recovery students. Three of those students are featured here.

Michael Girard

When Michael Girard began first grade in fall 2006, he struggled with attention and focus as he began to read and write. Because he was well below his peers, Michael was referred for Reading Recovery lessons with Reading Recovery teacher Virginia (Ginny) Conefrey. Ginny recalls that he began lessons reading at Level 1, was easily distracted, and struggled to maintain attention and focus in the early days.

As Michael's Reading Recovery lessons continued, he and Ginny developed a bond that helped him focus attention more consistently and accelerate his learning. Ginny reports that he particularly enjoyed the Toytown books.

At home, Michael's mother began to also see changes, as he sometimes voluntarily turned off the television in favor of reading. Michael's lessons were successfully discontinued after 20 weeks with his Reading Recovery teacher.



As a sixth grader today, Michael is still progressing with his classmates. He enjoys fishing on Cape Cod and is a member of his middle school cross-country team. He reads magazines, biographies, and anything he can about history or U.S. presidents.

Michael's mother said, "Reading Recovery was huge" for Michael. She does not believe he would have come this far without it and credits at least part of this success to the strong relationship that both she and her son developed with his Reading Recovery teacher. In addition, she believes that the lesson structure makes an important difference for a child who struggles to focus attention.

"Reading Recovery gave him the tools he needed to be successful in school," she said.



As a first grader (above), Michael struggled to maintain focus in his reading. Today he reads magazines, biographies, and anything he can about history or U.S. presidents.

Anastasia McDowell

As a first grader at Ezra H. Baker School in Dennis, MA, Anastasia was well below average in reading and writing. She did not control 1:1 match and confused the concepts of letters and words. She struggled to maintain the attention and focus, often interrupting her reading with personal connections.

"I don't know how to read," she told her Reading Recovery teacher, Jeanne Ryan.

Just 18 short weeks later, Anastasia found great joy in her reading. She read with great expression and fluency. By the end of first grade she was reading and comprehending text at Level 24, well above grade level.

As a successful sixth grader, Anastasia is still an eager reader. She



Now a successful sixth grader (right), Anastasia was well below average in reading and writing when she began Recovery Recovery lessons in first grade.



enjoys school and demonstrates good responsibility for her homework that has substantially increased in middle school. Outside of school, Anastasia is still a voracious reader but also

enjoys extracurricular activities, taking Tae Kwon Do classes and being a member of the cross-country team at her middle school.

Anastasia's parents write

While we were not sure how Reading Recovery would help Anastasia, we trusted her teacher to provide the opportunities it promised. We saw results slowly but consistently. After some time, Anastasia put it all together and she shot off like a rocket.

She now reads daily, any quiet moment she finds, in the car, before breakfast, late at night. She has been through the nine-book series by Laura Ingalls-Wilder and, more recently, the Harry Potter series, reading 800-page books in 3 or 4 days.

We are so pleased with Anastasia's results that when her younger brother's teacher asked how we felt about Reading Recovery for him, we were thrilled because we knew it would help. It did.

— Daniel and Patricia McDowell



Brendan Arledge

Brendan Arledge, a 1993 Reading Recovery student at Marguerite E. Small Elementary School, proudly holds his newborn son, Landen. His wife holds a gift from Brendan's former Reading Recovery teacher, Debbie Clemence (right), who retired from her role as teacher leader at the Cape Cod Reading Recovery training site last year. Brendan graduated from Cape Cod Community College with an associate's degree in fire science and worked as a paramedic after college. As a Marine, he recently served as a paramedic in Afghanistan.