

## PRINCIPAL INFORMATION SERIES

A current trend is to require schools to justify expenses to their stakeholders. This has led to assumptions that on the surface may seem logical, but can fall short when the evidence is examined more deeply.



# Reading Recovery

# BEYOND ONE YEAR - COST EFFECTIVENESS

### Small-group instruction may not be more cost-effective than individualized instruction

On the surface, small-group instruction may appear to be a cost-effective alternative to individualized instruction, the logic being that placing more children with a single teacher equates to less cost per pupil for the instruction. However, the facts may not support this logic. An underlying assumption of the logic is that all children can learn from small-group interventions provided by districts. Evidence from a large-scale research study (May, Sirinides, Gray, & Goldsworthy, 2016) demonstrated that many children do not benefit from the kinds of small-group interventions provided by schools, but do respond to the individualized instruction provided by Reading Recovery. A key point is that effectiveness has to be linked to costs for the analysis of cost to be meaningful. It is expensive to put children into programs that do not create growth regardless of the size of the group. It is even more expensive to repeat the placement of these children in groups over the life of the child in the school.

### Real cost-effectiveness analysis is detailed and deep.

Often one hears that an intervention is or is not expensive compared to another intervention. Rarely, however, do those making the point describe in any detail comparative cost-effectiveness data. The opinion usually can be traced to budgeted amount or a line-item in a budget.

This level of consideration does not reflect the true cost of an intervention. For example, the budgeted amount for an intervention may not reveal the actual cost of the intervention because the impact of the intervention may be realized over several years. As case in point, when a Reading Recovery student is discontinued from the intervention and no longer requires an additional teacher for support, the result is a savings to the district in that the resources that may have been directed long term to support this particular student can now be redirected to another who actually needs a long-term support. Additionally, the cost of materials and supplies purchased and reported in a single budget period may distort the perceived cost of the intervention because, as is the case in Reading Recovery, the books or materials may be used by several children and may be reused over several years.

In order to account for these kinds of variables, administrators are encouraged to engage in a deeper analysis of costs when considering school reform (Stoneberg, 2015). However, it is clear that guidance in the methodology to complete cost effectiveness analysis is needed. Administrators wishing to conduct such an analysis are encouraged to review the resource **“Cost Effectiveness Analysis as a Decision Tool in Selecting and Implementing Instructional Interventions in Literacy”** for specific guidance. This excellent resource and more information is available on the Reading Recovery Council of North America website ([www.readingrecovery.org](http://www.readingrecovery.org)).

### Additional teachers should only be a short-term proposition.

Adding additional teachers beyond a classroom teacher in order to educate a struggling child is costly. This is especially true when considering the costs over several years, as is the case for placement in long-term supportive programs like special education. The goal must be to intervene in a manner that is short term and highly effective (Clay, 2016) and thus reduce the need for additional teachers over the long term. A primary purpose of Reading Recovery is to reduce or eliminate the number of at-risk students who require long-term support in literacy. While it is true that many children come to school at risk of literacy failure, it is also true that Reading Recovery has a strong record of children's accelerated progress — to the point that they are capable of responding to classroom instruction without the need of additional supportive programs.



### Resources

Clay, M. M. (2016). *Literacy lessons designed for individuals* (2nd ed.). Auckland, New Zealand: Global Education Systems (GES) Ltd.

Hummel-Rossi, B., & Ashdown, J. (2010, July). *Cost effectiveness analysis as a decision tool in selecting and implementing instructional interventions in literacy*. Reading Recovery Council of North America. [https://readingrecovery.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Cost\\_Effectiveness\\_Analysis\\_2010.pdf](https://readingrecovery.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Cost_Effectiveness_Analysis_2010.pdf)

May, H. Sirinides, P., Gray, A., & Goldsworthy, H. (2016). *Reading Recovery: An evaluation of the four-year i3 scale-up*. Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE). [https://readingrecovery.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/i3\\_evaluation\\_of\\_reading\\_recovery\\_final\\_report-rev-web.pdf](https://readingrecovery.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/i3_evaluation_of_reading_recovery_final_report-rev-web.pdf)

Stoneberg, B. D. (2015). Real cost-benefit analysis is needed in American public education. *Practical Assessment Research & Evaluation*, 20(15).