The Plainfield Longitudinal Study was conducted as a response to administrators’ and teachers’ concerns about whether Reading Recovery children continue to maintain their gains beyond the first grade. Although administrators acknowledged the overall effectiveness of the program in first grade, they wanted to know what type of progress the Reading Recovery children made in subsequent years to further verify the success of the intervention.

To monitor the progress of Reading Recovery children in Grades 1 through 5, this study focused on 306 children who had been served in Reading Recovery during the 1994–1995 and 1995–1996 school years. In keeping with Standards and Guidelines of the Reading Recovery Council of North America, the children represented the lowest 20 percent of their first-grade cohorts. These two groups of children were followed in this study. The sample included successfully discontinued students* and full-program students who were not discontinued but received 60 or more Reading Recovery lessons.

Three questions guided the study:

1. Are Reading Recovery children able to read increasingly more difficult text at grade level as measured by the Scott Foresman-Ginn text reading passages?

2. Do discontinued Reading Recovery children maintain the ability to read average level, teacher-selected classroom materials, and do they maintain this ability through Grade 5?

3. What reading grade did the Reading Recovery children receive on their report cards from their classroom teachers in Grades 2, 3, 4, and 5?

Several measures addressed these questions. Children in Grades 2 and 3 were administered both the Scott Foresman-Ginn text reading passages and average level classroom material from a basal text or story chosen by the classroom teacher. Fourth and fifth graders were assessed using the teacher-selected classroom material only. Reading Recovery teachers tested children annually at the end of the school year. The final measure was end-of-year reading grades.

* In Reading Recovery, students who are successfully discontinued have demonstrated independent reading and writing strategies that will allow continued achievement, are able to read within the average range of class performance, and have made accelerated gains—not only increasing knowledge but doing so at an accelerated rate.
assigned by classroom teachers in Grades 2 through 5.

Data from all these measures were recorded on a data sheet at the end of each year of the study.

Answers to the Study Questions

1. Are Reading Recovery children able to read increasingly more difficult text at grade level as measured by the Scott Foresman-Ginn text reading passages?

Most Reading Recovery students were reading at or above grade level at the end of Grades 2 and 3. Table 1 shows the percentage of children reading at or above grade level as measured by the Scott Foresman-Ginn text reading passages. For discontinued students, 95% of second graders were at or above grade level (text level 20 or higher) and 99% of third graders read at or above grade level (text level 24 or higher). Many of the full-program non-discontinued students also read at grade level or higher: 46% of second graders and 76% of the third graders. For the full group of students, 90% of children read at grade level by end of second grade, and by the end of third grade, 98% were reading at grade level.

2. Do discontinued Reading Recovery children maintain the ability to read average level, teacher-selected classroom materials, and do they maintain this ability through Grade 5?

Reading Recovery students overwhelmingly maintained their ability to read average level, teacher-selected classroom materials through Grade 5. Table 2 shows strong results both for discontinued and non-discontinued full-program students who had a full series of Reading Recovery lessons. For discontinued students, 93% read classroom materials with at least 90% accuracy in Grade 2, and the percent grew to 99% by Grades 4 and 5. Non-discontinued full-program children also demonstrated their ability to accurately read classroom materials. By the end of Grade 2, 59% of non-discontinued students met the criteria, growing to 93% by the end of Grade 5. There was a small group of non-discontinued children who appeared to catch up with their peers in third through fifth grades.

These findings indicate that discontinued students not only become average or better readers in first grade, they develop a self-extending learning system that enables them to continue learning at least as quickly as their peers.

3. What reading grade did the Reading Recovery children receive on their report cards from their classroom teachers in Grades 2, 3, 4, and 5?

In addition to the children’s oral reading of texts, the study included the classroom teachers’ perspective as measured by end-of-year reading grades in Grades 2 through 5.

Using grades as a measure posed some interesting problems. For example, different districts, schools, and teachers used different forms of measurements. Some districts used letter grades of A, B, C, D, and F, while others used the measurements of S for satisfactory progress and N to indicate that the child needs help. We found some districts that used a
short narrative to describe the children’s progress.

We decided to use the numerals of 1, 2, and 3 to indicate the following ratings: 1 to indicate above average progress, 2 to indicate average progress, and 3 to indicate below average progress. Letter grades of A and B were converted to 1 to indicate above average progress, C was converted to 2 to indicate average progress, and D and F were recorded as below average progress. For the other grade interpretations, we contacted the classroom teachers to help us interpret the grades using our rating system. Generally, the teachers were able to make the conversions rather easily.

Table 3 demonstrates the classroom teachers’ perspective by reviewing the end-of-the-year reading grades that the children received from their classroom teacher in Grades 2 through 5.

The expectation was that since the children were continuing to maintain their reading gains as demonstrated by the other two measures, their grades would also be average. That expectation was supported by the data. However, it was a pleasant surprise to see that the classroom teachers reported many of these children as above average readers. A large number of discontinued students were rated in that range.

A small percentage of discontinued students were considered below average in their progress. The reasons listed for this evaluation were incomplete classwork or homework, high absences, and behavior issues. In a few cases the children were reading at level but their peers’ average reading levels were so high (one to two years beyond the designated grade level) that the classroom teacher viewed the on-level children’s performance as below level in comparison.

The Reading Recovery teachers who tested intermediate students indicated that the classroom teachers were often surprised when told that the students involved in the longitudinal study were former Reading Recovery students. They reported comments such as, “I can’t believe this child ever had reading difficulties” and “This child is one of my best readers and enjoys reading.”

**Reading Recovery and Classroom Instruction**

Many factors affect a child’s continuing performance on literacy tasks as time passes. Therefore, a child’s performance cannot be attributed solely to the success or failure of the intervention. Appropriate and good quality classroom literacy instruction is an important factor in helping children sustain their gains.

The districts in this study found that the Reading Recovery intervention was very effective in helping most of the lowest-performing students reach and maintain average levels of performance. Focusing on gains over several years highlighted classroom and school factors needed to sustain these gains.

The impact of Reading Recovery went beyond the children served. It affected and changed literacy practices in the classroom and curriculum. Through staff development and careful planning for reading instruction, the Reading Recovery and classroom teachers coordinated their efforts to help all children, especially those with the greatest need. The ongoing staff development of kindergarten and first-grade teachers, provided by Reading Recovery teachers, has been a catalyst for evaluating commonly accepted practices and raising the teachers’ expectations for

| Table 3: End-Of-Year Report Card Reading Grades Of Reading Recovery Children in Grades 2, 3, 4, and 5 |
|----------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Grade 2                          |        |        |        |
| Discontinued (N=203)             | 30%    | 59%    | 11%    |
| Program Non-Discontinued (N=27)  | 7%     | 62%    | 31%    |
| All (N=230)                      | 27%    | 59%    | 14%    |
| Grade 3                          |        |        |        |
| Discontinued (N=181)             | 39%    | 50%    | 11%    |
| Program Non-Discontinued (N=19)  | 5%     | 37%    | 58%    |
| All (N=200)                      | 36%    | 49%    | 15%    |
| Grade 4                          |        |        |        |
| Discontinued (N=154)             | 26%    | 56%    | 18%    |
| Program Non-Discontinued (N=16)  | 12%    | 38%    | 50%    |
| All (N=170)                      | 25%    | 55%    | 20%    |
| Grade 5                          |        |        |        |
| Discontinued (N=154)             | 41%    | 45%    | 14%    |
| Program Non-Discontinued (N=14)  | 14%    | 43%    | 43%    |
| All (N=168)                      | 39%    | 45%    | 16%    |
all students. Classroom teachers are using shared and guided reading activities, teaching children concepts about print, and emphasizing the use of writing by children to support the learning of reading concepts. These practices have helped Consortium schools improve their comprehensive literacy programs as they support Reading Recovery students.

**Summary**

In summarizing the discontinued students’ performance, the collective data of Reading Recovery students provides a supportive and impressive profile of their gains after receiving Reading Recovery. Data indicates that discontinued students who were at the bottom 20 percent of their first-grade class despite their initial literacy difficulties subsequently achieved within the average expectations for the grade level in reading. The study indicates that they maintain their gains and continue to make average and even above average progress in Grades 2 through 5, based not only on their oral reading performance but also on their reading class grades. The classroom teachers’ end-of-year reading grades support the students’ sustained reading progress. Although individual grading procedures may differ across schools, grades, or teachers, the high percentage of average and above average grades received by this group support the consistency of the group’s progress on oral reading measures. All three measures demonstrate that students who were discontinued maintained their progress into fifth grade.

**Author’s Acknowledgement:** I would like to thank all the contributing Reading Recovery teachers who provided the longitudinal data to make this study possible.

---

**Plainfield Consortium Administrators Say Study Supports Long-Term Benefits**

“The results of this longitudinal study help make the case that the Reading Recovery approach has a lasting impact on children. All children benefit from Reading Recovery, whether or not they discontinue from the program, and view themselves as more strategic, independent readers.”

*Joan Huchthausen, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction*  
*Glen Ellyn Community Consolidated School District 89*

“Educational decisions must be based on sound data and this type of study gives us information for further instructional planning.”

*Dr. Cheryl Kopecky*  
*Elmhurst Community Unit District 205*

“Reading Recovery works! Over time it is a proven early intervention that lessens the need for other forms of remediation and tutoring programs. The long-term effect on the children has been shown to be sustained and cost effective.”

*Jim Maize, Principal*  
*Fairview School, Darien School District #61*

“Longitudinal studies, such as this one, are very beneficial for illustrating to school board members and administrators of curriculum the long-term benefits of this intensive one-on-one delivery model of Reading Recovery. In a time when we all need to be excellent stewards of our district resources, it is a celebration, indeed, to see such consistent data supporting the long-term benefits of this reading intervention program.

“In addition to sustained or increased levels of literacy achievement, we have also found that our Reading Recovery students maintain or continue to grow in their positive self-images after the lessons have ended. The long-term benefits of this positive sense of self-worth, contrasted to what could have been without appropriate intervention, cannot be underestimated.”

*Jamie Reilly, Principal*  
*Park View School, Glen Ellyn, IL*