Implementing RTI and Staffing Reading Recovery in Difficult Economic Times

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Reading Recovery training and continuous professional development are well known to equip teachers to respond effectively to the most-struggling first-grade students in one-to-one lessons and to a range of other literacy learners in small-group and classroom settings. Thus, many schools have included Reading Recovery as an essential component of their response to intervention (RTI) plans in support of a proven instructional response to students in preK through the elementary grades. Nevertheless, as part of their school's RTI plan, an administrator is often faced with the challenge of providing needed interventions to all of their struggling students without the advantage of being able to add staff.

Implementing Reading Recovery in the current economic climate may present staffing and scheduling challenges to schools, but it can be accomplished. Based on communication with site coordinators, teacher leaders, administrators, and school teams who have successfully implemented Reading Recovery, we present the following selected case examples, recommended actions steps, and resources in response to the challenges of allocating time and staff for Reading Recovery instruction.

Many school districts are incorporating Reading Recovery as an essential component of their RTI plans. School teams, like this one in the River Valley (Iowa) School District, regularly examine test scores and benchmark assessments to consider how best to allocate staff and instructional time on behalf of children.

Case Examples of Staffing for Reading Recovery Instruction

Cambridge, MA
Reading Recovery Site/District

Created by a team of educators, the early literacy interventionist (ELI) K–3 position supports the RTI implementation in Cambridge (see Appendix A). Position requirements were developed by Mary Grassi, Title I director and Reading Recovery site coordinator; Janice Tingle, English language arts curriculum coordinator K–12; and Michael Buonaiuto, Reading Recovery teacher leader.

The school district's ELI educators provide Tier 2 instruction not only to Reading Recovery children and higher-performing literacy learners in small groups and classrooms, but also participate in the school's special education and primary literacy review teams and collaborate with the school's literacy coach to administer formative assessments throughout the school year. Minimum qualifications of the Cambridge ELI position include a master's degree or higher, experience working with primary-grade children and children with reading/learning disabilities, and training in Reading Recovery.

With their focus on early intervention, Cambridge administrators utilize the expertise of their Reading Recovery-trained teachers to extend their RTI services to more children in the primary grades.

The Reading Recovery Council of Massachusetts (RRCMA) also has developed a position paper to guide the implementation of RTI using Reading Recovery-trained interventionists in the state's school districts (see Appendix B). The RRCMA advises that for RTI to be maximally effective, high-quality, cost-effective, and intensive intervention to prevent long-term failure must be provided at the earliest indication of a child's literacy learning difficulty. To achieve this goal, they argue for Reading Recovery-trained ELIs to support children's reading and writing achievement in Grades K–3. Within a school's RTI plan, these Reading Recovery-trained interventionists would provide push-in and pull-out support to children in small focused groups in guided reading, guided writing, phonics, and word study, and also provide Reading Recovery lessons to the most-struggling learners in Grade 1.

Individual schools within the Fort Bend site have implemented creative responses to the challenges of staffing for Reading Recovery instruction. Enlisting the entire staff in discussions of teaching schedules ensures the provision of time for the one-to-one instruction.

Fort Bend, TX
Reading Recovery Site

Mary Jackson, Reading Recovery site coordinator and director of Title I programs, and Cathy Duvall, teacher leader, cite several flexible staffing models that support the establishment of Reading Recovery in schools newly implementing the intervention in the Fort Bend Reading Recovery site. As a first step, Jackson and Duvall recommend meeting with the principals of the schools new to the intervention, asking that they avoid scheduling extra duties for the teachers trained in Reading Recovery. Rather than scheduling these teachers to cover duties that could be performed by a member of the paraprofessional staff, budget conscious administrators are advised to ensure a maximum return on the school's investment of training and continuous professional support by fully deploying Reading Recovery-trained teachers to provide individual and small-group literacy interventions continuously throughout the school day. Second, they advise enlisting the entire staff in discussions of their teaching schedules to ensure the provision of time for one-to-one instruction. Working collaboratively, individual schools affiliated with the Fort Bend site have implemented creative responses to the challenges of staffing for Reading Recovery in both large and small schools as described below.

Large school with multiple sections of first grade

Staff at a large school with 150 students in six sections of first grade determined that three Reading Recovery-trained teachers would be needed to serve all their students who require Reading Recovery support in first grade. When not teaching Reading Recovery, two of the school's Reading Recovery-trained teachers provide small-group literacy

instruction to children in Grades K–5. The third teacher trained in Reading Recovery serves as one of the six first-grade classroom teachers. To allocate time for this teacher's teaching of Reading Recovery lessons, her first-grade colleagues agreed to teach her first-grade students during the time for mathematics instruction and the science/social studies block. While the number of students has increased by 4–5—to approximately 29 students taught by each of the five first-grade teachers during these times—they have found it manageable. By working as a team and focusing on how to achieve the goal of full coverage of Reading Recovery, these first-grade teachers ensure Reading Recovery service for all the students who need the intervention, but without the addition of teaching staff.

Small school with non load-bearing staff training in Reading Recovery
A small rural school in the Fort Bend site has sponsored the training of a school librarian who provides Reading Recovery lessons during part of her day. Instead of a full-time assignment as a librarian, approximately 2.5 hours of her employment are devoted to Reading Recovery lessons. Classroom teachers and paraprofessional staff team to cover the time she is away from library work, and selected middle-grade students volunteer once per week to help their younger schoolmates select and check out books. The arrangement has opened up new opportunities for making Reading Recovery a part of the school's intervention services while also enabling middle-school students to provide cross-age support for the district's young learners and provide an important service to the school.

Dowagiac, MI
Kincheloe Elementary School
Patti Brallier, director of state and federal grants program, and Dawn Conner, principal, implemented an effective plan for staffing Reading Recovery and literacy interventions "on a shoestring." The school employs three Reading Recovery-trained teachers to provide Reading Recovery lessons to the lowest-performing first-grade students. Two of the three teachers provide classroom instruction for the school's two sections of first grade. A third Reading Recovery-trained teacher, partially funded with at-risk funds, provides small-group literacy interventions for students in Grades K–3. A half-time substitute teacher employed with Title I funds teaches social studies and science to the two sections of first-grade students, creating release time for the first-grade teachers' Reading Recovery teaching. Because the school is more than fully implemented in Reading Recovery, each year one of these three teachers reduces her Reading Recovery teaching load from a minimum of eight students to four students so that the Reading Recovery-trained staff can continue their involvement in the Reading Recovery continuing professional development while also providing lessons. With this staffing arrangement, the school maintains a high level of support for students in all grades, keeps literacy group sizes small, and ensures grade-level reading and writing performance for all first graders by the end of Grade 1 — all without the cost of adding full-time teaching staff.

An effective staffing plan allows a Michigan school to maintain a high level of support for students in all grades, keep literacy group sizes small, and ensure grade-level reading and writing performance for all first graders by the end of Grade 1 — all without the cost of adding full-time teaching staff.

Action Steps for Reading Recovery Staffing and Scheduling

Establish school teams
School teams focus on continuous quality improvement and oversee the coordination and the delivery of interventions for a range of learners in the school. Members of the school team include a variety of teaching and support staff including classroom teachers, reading specialists, special educators, ESL/bilingual teachers, interventionist teachers, school counselors and, very importantly, the building principal. Strong research evidence points to the school principal as the single most important factor related to school improvement. School teams regularly examine data—test scores, and benchmark assessments—to consider how best to allocate staff and instructional time on behalf of children. Often each member of the school team maintains a list of two or three children who are receiving interventions and whose progress is frequently monitored throughout the school year to ensure that no child is "left behind."

Commit to a schoolwide philosophy that all children can learn

A philosophy that all children can learn and it is the shared responsibility of all staff and administrators to realize this goal can provide the essential catalyst for scheduling and appropriately staffing the interventions required for children's literacy success. Often it is this philosophy that helps school teams focus precisely on what initially seem to be insurmountable: the challenges and the obstacles to fully implementing and staffing Reading Recovery.

Identify staff for the position of early literacy interventionist

Early literacy interventionists trained in Reading Recovery can provide much-needed intervention services for children in Grades K–3. Working alongside other specialist teachers in the school, the early literacy interventionist can provide Reading Recovery lessons, serve on the school team, work with the school's literacy coach to administer beginning-, mid-, and end-of-year literacy assessments, and coordinate the scheduling of the push-in and pull-out small-group interventions for the school's at-risk literacy learners.

Resources for Staffing and Scheduling Time for Reading Recovery Instruction

Dorn, L., & Schubert, B. (2008). A comprehensive intervention model for preventing literacy failure: A response to intervention process. *The Journal of Reading Recovery, 7*(2), 29–41.

The authors discuss the Comprehensive Intervention Model (CIM) as an effective RTI method including details for how layers fit within a four-tiered design, followed by a description of the intervention components and research on the model. The authors present a framework for implementing the CIM in a school with examples of staffing and scheduling in various grades throughout the school day. Available online in RRCNA Members Only journal archive.

Forbes, S., Swenson, B., Person, T., & Reed, J. (2008). Reading Recovery: A major component of many RTI models. *The Journal of Reading Recovery, 7*(2), 53–56.

The authors present examples for RTI models from two school districts. In Brainerd Schools, Reading Recovery-trained teachers staff the school's Tier 2 intervention for first graders with small-group intervention for older, higher-performing learners and the Literacy Collaborative professional development and coaching model for teachers of classroom and small-group interventions. In Rio Rancho Schools, Reading Recovery is available to first-grade students, and Reading Recovery training is provided to special education teachers to give them additional knowledge and expertise in literacy processing. Available online in RRCNA Members Only journal archive.

Lose, M. K. (2008). Using RTI to support struggling learners. *Principal, 87*(3), 20–23.

The author argues that it is not more time that is needed to respond to learners who appear to be slow learning, but better use of the instructional time that is available. The author advocates for evidence-based RTI approaches that emphasize teacher expertise and that can be implemented immediately by principals in their schools. Available online at http://www.naesp.org/teaching-slow-learner-janfeb-2008-0

A Principal's Guide to Reading Recovery. (2003). Columbus, OH: Reading Recovery Council of North America.

The guide is organized by topics that experienced principals have said are important to ongoing program operation. A detailed table of contents is provided, as well as an index, a glossary, and a troubleshooting section to answer frequently asked questions including assignment of teachers during non-Reading Recovery instruction time. (Available at the RRCNA Online Store.)

A Site Coordinator's Guide to Reading Recovery. (2006). Worthington, OH: Reading Recovery Council of North America.

The guide presents a template for implementation including establishing Reading Recovery as part of a comprehensive approach to literacy. The guide also includes cost estimates and number of teachers needed to staff Reading Recovery. Additional sections address recruiting, selecting, and training teachers in Reading Recovery. (Available at the RRCNA Online Store.)

Carefully consider the selection of teachers for training in Reading Recovery

Identify the teachers who have at least 3 years effective teaching and whose commitment to work with the lowest-performing learners will sustain them in successfully completing the year of Reading Recovery training.

Flexibly allocate time for the teaching of lessons

First, release the identified teachers from other instructional roles for at least four-tenths of their instructional day, approximately 2.5 hours during a typical 6-hour school day. For each teacher, ensure the provision of at least four 30-minute lessons each day. Second, depending on input from the school team and the teacher trainee and continuing teachers of Reading Recovery, determine children's availability for lessons before or after school and arrange a flexible schedule that would permit a teacher to start the school day earlier or later than other staff, but end the day after completing a full day of teaching. A flexible schedule might appeal to the teaching staff and permit lessons to be arranged more flexibly during children's time at school without compromising the instructional roles of these teachers during the other part of their day.

Enlist the teaching staff in discussions of staff allocation and teaching schedules

Seek input from the teaching staff including grade-level colleagues and other members of the school team. First ask, "How can we make this important work happen?" Next, determine what part of the Reading Recovery-trained teacher's current assignment will need to be reallocated to other staff. Encourage thinking "outside the box." Can this teacher's students be reassigned to one or more classrooms for larger group teaching, such as during social studies, science, or physical education? Can the other grade-level teachers assume responsibility for the interventionist teacher's students during recesses? Could these students receive an additional library time each week? Can some of an interventionist's instructional time be allocated to an early start or later ending to the school day? Would it be possible for teachers to work cross-grade level to deliver some parts of the curriculum or increase their team teaching time during the day and thus reserve weekly time for planning and team collaboration on a rotating basis with their colleagues from other grade levels? (See i3 FAQ at Reading Recovery Center of Michigan at Oakland University: http://www.oakland.edu/readingrecovery.)

Conclusion

Each school is unique and will need to develop its own scenarios for finding time for Reading Recovery instruction while keeping the learning experiences robust for children in the classroom and small-group settings. This issue illustrates the importance of helping all staff understand that Reading Recovery is a schoolwide intervention that will need the support of multiple staff members to affect the learning outcomes of more than just the individual first graders with whom the interventionist teacher, trained in Reading Recovery, has direct contact. A starting point for discussions among administrators, teaching staff, and school teams may be the commitment to a shared philosophy that all children can learn and that it is our collective responsibility to make that happen. Often it is the action steps taken by the progressive school administrator in collaboration with school teams that are the catalyst for these important discussions. Staffing and implementing Reading Recovery flexibly may present challenges to administrators, but fortunately for the students in our schools, our ingenuity and efforts have no limits.

About the Authors

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Appendix A
Position Description: Reading Recovery-Trained Early Literacy Interventionist Cambridge, MA Public Schools

Position: Early Literacy Interventionist, K-3

Duties:

The Early Literacy Interventionist (ELI) is responsible for providing literacy support to identified students who are below grade level in reading and writing in grades K-3. The ELI will provide Tier II support in the classroom and/or through pull out by working in small, focused groups in guided reading, guided writing and word study using the Leveled Literacy Intervention System, and by providing Reading Recovery to selected first graders. Responsibilities include selection of students, assessment of students, keeping accurate records, and analyzing student data to inform instruction. The ELI will assist teachers with the identification of students who demonstrate difficulties in achieving early literacy skills and determining what support they may need. The ELI must be able to communicate effectively and collaborate with teachers, support staff, and administrators, use data as the basis for instructional decision making and ensure with fidelity, the implementation of the intervention programs according to established standards and guidelines.

Other responsibilities include: attend monthly ongoing professional development in Reading Recovery and Leveled Literacy Intervention provided by Interventionist Teacher Leaders; participate in weekly early literacy cluster meetings; collaborate with the Building Literacy Coach to coordinate the administration of the fall, winter and spring Early Literacy Assessment; sit on committees such as TAT, Primary Review Team, Instructional Leadership Team. The ELI is directly responsible to the K-12 English Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator.

Experience: At least five years successful experience working with primary grade children and children with reading/learning disabilities.

Minimum Requirements: Master's degree or higher from an accredited college or university.

Certification: Massachusetts Certification: Teacher: Elementary, Early Childhood, or Moderate Disabilities. Reading Specialist certification preferred. Certification in Reading Recovery or willingness to train.*

* Individuals who are hired as Early Literacy Interventionists but who are not certified in Reading Recovery must attend a week-long summer training institute and participate in a weekly year-long training class provided by the district in conjunction with Lesley University.

Appendix B.1
Implementation Guide Developed by Reading Recovery Council of Massachusetts
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Reading Recovery-Trained Early Literacy Interventionists: Highest-Quality Professionals for Maximum Impact

Response to Intervention requires the provision of layers of early intervening services for children who are struggling to acquire literacy to prevent long-term special education services. For RTI to be truly effective, **high-quality** intervention must be provided to students in the primary grades. A Reading Recovery-trained Early Literacy Interventionist can provide a powerful, intensive, cost-effective intervention tied to positive outcomes at the optimal point in time to prevent long-term failure.

A Reading Recovery-trained Interventionist is a skilled provider of literacy support to students who are below grade level in reading and writing in grades K-3. The Reading Recovery-trained Interventionist provides support in the classroom and/or through pull out by working in small, focused groups in guided reading, guided writing, phonics, and word study, and by providing Reading Recovery to the lowest-achieving students in grade one.

What makes a Reading Recovery-Trained Interventionist effective?

Reading Recovery-trained Interventionists begin as expert classroom teachers, special educators, reading specialists or teachers of English as a second language. Their expertise is expanded through Reading Recovery intensive training that includes:

- A year long training class that emphasizes close observation of students, responsive teaching based on a deep understanding of the reading and writing process, and use of evidence-based teaching procedures.
- Participation in a community of learners who focus regularly on learning from live lessons.
- Frequent on-going professional development.
- Field support from Teacher Leaders who are connected to a university training site.
- Guidance by national standards and guidelines.

What does a Reading Recovery Trained Interventionist Do?

Reading Recovery-trained Interventionists work flexibly in order to fit the needs of individual schools. In addition to providing intensive individual Reading Recovery instruction to the lowest-achieving students in first grade, they assume a variety of roles that reach a wide range of underperforming students in the primary grades.

A. **Assessment and Progress Monitoring**
The Reading Recovery-trained Interventionist works with classroom teachers to assess all students, identify those who are achieving below expectations in reading and writing, and monitor progress.

Appendix B.2

B. **Small group intervention**
The Reading Recovery-trained Interventionist provides daily short-term supplemental intervention to students in small groups using evidence-based interventions.

C. **Push-in support**
The Reading Recovery-trained Interventionist works with individuals or small groups as they engage in the literacy activities in their classrooms to ensure success in all of the student's learning environments.

D. **Work with special populations**
The Reading Recovery-trained Interventionist brings expertise to the teaching of students who are English Language Learners or who are receiving special education services.

E. **Literacy support**
The Reading Recovery-trained Interventionist works with colleagues to support/model good one-to-one and small group instruction.

Benefits of Having Reading Recovery-Trained Interventionists

Schools with a Reading Recovery-trained Interventionist increase their capacity to address and analyze problems related to literacy difficulties. Having a Reading Recovery-trained Interventionist contributes to:

- Effectiveness: Reading Recovery-trained Interventionists use evidence-based interventions with a focus on accelerating the rate of student learning.
- Efficiency: Reading Recovery-trained Interventionists work primarily in short-term interventions, allowing them to provide instruction to large numbers of students each school year. By providing interventions early in the student's academic career, they prevent more severe difficulties later on.
- Collaboration: Reading Recovery-trained Interventionists become literacy resources in their schools and are active in carrying over their work into the classroom.
- Cost effectiveness: The work of the Reading Recovery-trained Interventionists reduces the need for special education, retention, and other remedial efforts.

Developed by the Reading Recovery Council of Massachusetts