We are a school district steeped in tradition with a value system that rewards hard work and commitment. The bulk of our tax dollars comes from two large entities, but our single greatest source of funding is derived from our agricultural community. One can drive for several hours exploring more than 110 square miles of farmland and small neighborhoods that form the backbone of the district. We serve approximately 6,000 students with a budget of slightly over $50,000,000. Educating young people to be productive and honest citizens who strive to improve the quality of life for each succeeding generation is very important. The family structure, an emphasis on literacy, and a competitive economic market are the strengths of our community. Perhaps the district’s mission statement, as framed by the Penn Manor Board of Directors in 1998, says it best: “The Penn Manor School District shall strive for academic and personal excellence, by fostering a democratic environment which motivates students, teachers, administrators, and parents to work collaboratively to improve the instructional program.”

Improved instruction for more students was the goal in 1990 when a committee of teachers, reading specialists, and administrators began researching a better way to boost achievement for underachieving children. A study of the district’s transitional year program, which allowed children an extra year between kindergarten and first grade, found that the program was expensive and unsuccessful in preventing school failure or students from dropping out. After extensive study, the committee recommended Reading Recovery as the best intervention to bring our lowest-achieving first graders up to class average. It also offered the benefit of extensive teacher training in literacy.

Beginning in 1991, the district decided to implement Reading Recovery as the early intervention for first graders who struggled with literacy. A teacher leader was hired, and in 1992, seven teachers attended our first training class. The following year, four additional teachers were trained and the district reached full coverage (see Figure 1).

Full implementation of Reading Recovery requires a sizable expenditure in terms of personnel, training,
maintaining guidelines for a 20-week program allows more children to be served

In 1998, Dr. Marie Clay was the featured speaker at the Reading Recovery Implementation Institute in Pennsylvania. One of the issues she addressed in regard to efficient program implementation was length of intervention. She cited the 1991 study she conducted with Bryan Tuck as evidence that the upper limit of time in program should be 20 weeks (Clay & Tuck, 1992). The Clay and Tuck study strongly recommended that a reasonable time for a child to make progress is 20 weeks, otherwise a more intensive program is necessary. One way of managing costs associated with the program is by adhering to the upper limit of time that the child is in the program.

At Penn Manor School District, many students remained in the program far too long, limiting the opportunity for others to participate in Reading Recovery. Beginning in 1998–1999, children who needed long-term interventions were identified more quickly and new students were placed in Reading Recovery. We gathered longitudinal data that showed the dramatic effect of monitoring time in program on the percentage of students served after we implemented this more efficient approach (see Figure 2). The number of trained teachers remained constant from 1995–1996 to the present, but the percentage of students served increased by approximately 10%. This number represents an additional 23 students served per year. For Penn Manor School District, approximately 30% of the first-grade population was served from the 1998 school year through 2001.

summer assessment provides more time for teaching

We decided to capitalize on Reading Recovery’s emphasis of working with a collaborative system of experts and specialists when needed. We invited assessment for all incoming first-grade students during the summer between kindergarten and first grade. Instead of waiting until the start of the school year, children in need of support were identified during the summer and selected for first-round Reading Recovery service in the fall. In this way, students began lessons immediately with the start of school. This
allowed more students to be served by using every available school day for Reading Recovery instruction.

In the past, if assessment for Reading Recovery selection was not completed during the summer, four to six weeks of potential lesson time was lost. As compensation for their summer hours, in-service credit was offered to teachers who conducted the assessment. In addition to the more formal training provided through in-service courses, newly hired primary teachers were required to attend assessment training so that they became familiar with our expectations.

The Value of Full Implementation

The most obvious benefit gained by full implementation was that more struggling readers were served. As noted above, Penn Manor School District increased service from 20% to 30% of first graders annually. The response from classroom teachers who were challenged to find ways to deal with students at the top and the bottom was overwhelming. Those youngsters formerly at the bottom of their class were now reading at grade level and were able to continue to progress with regular classroom instruction. In addition, Reading Recovery offered hope to parents who knew their youngsters were behind, and they marveled at their children’s progress.

By far the single most significant benefit of full implementation has been that a larger number of children end first grade as strong readers (see Figure 3).

By continuing to monitor the progress of students who discontinue and no longer need the intervention, we are able to evaluate its full power. Reading Recovery is not a place where children go to be fixed. It is a highly specialized program designed to accelerate the child’s ability to apply those strategies inherent to basic reading literacy. Achieving literacy for all children isn’t a simple matter. Since implementation began, we have understood that Reading Recovery is the safety net for the school’s comprehensive literacy program. In this way, Reading Recovery forms an important piece of our overall comprehensive plan for literacy.

Penn Manor’s Success: A Comprehensive Literacy Approach

Once Reading Recovery was in place, it was time to look more closely at classroom literacy instruction. Members of the primary teams and the Reading Recovery teachers met to design a K–2 curriculum to strengthen the literacy development of all students. Classroom teachers and Reading Recovery teachers worked to establish a common language, strategies, and methodologies.

In addition to the full implementation of Reading Recovery, Penn Manor School District teachers
• looked at providing staff development to classroom teachers in using components of the K–2 framework,
• reorganized and changed the curriculum of the kindergarten program,

![Figure 3. Stronger Implementation Improved Student Results](image-url)

Reaching more students in Reading Recovery brought improved results, with more children receiving a full series of lessons and more children who successfully completed their lessons (discontinued).
Implementation

- redefined the role of reading specialists, and
- instituted an extended-day kindergarten program for those 10 students in each building across the district having the most difficulty with literacy.

Our goal was to have as many children as possible at or above grade level by the start of Grade 3. We were delighted with the team approach that evolved through our efforts to develop and implement a sound early literacy program. Overall, we have found tremendous success in fulfilling our mission by reducing class sizes, providing quality in-service training, and allowing highly skilled teachers to coach novice teachers, experienced teachers, and administrators.

Adopting Reading Recovery is not a one-time event. We learned that after adoption, we needed to continue monitoring and using data to serve more students and improve results. At the beginning, teachers felt it would be an overwhelming task to teach all students to read and achieve at grade level; however, as a result of the implementation of Reading Recovery and a strong literacy framework, staff morale as well as student attendance, behavior, and achievement have greatly improved.

References

Let Us Hear From You!

The Journal of Reading Recovery welcomes comments on articles and Reading Recovery issues. Address letters to Editor, Journal of Reading Recovery, 1929 Kenny Road, Suite 100, Columbus, Ohio 43210, or e-mail to JRR_Reader_Response@readingrecovery.org. Letters selected will be edited for space. Please include your name, address, e-mail address, city, and state so we can contact you if needed.