Reading Recovery and IDEA Legislation: Early Intervening Service (EIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI)

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Reading Recovery can play an important role in a school’s implementation of the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; IDEA). It is a compelling option for schools that are designing response to intervention (RTI) models to meet the needs of struggling readers and writers. Reading Recovery deserves the attention of administrators and policymakers at local, state, and national levels who are charged with:

• ensuring early identification and early intervention for all children struggling with literacy learning.
• providing a way to appropriately identify children with learning disabilities (LD).
• providing effective, intensive, evidence-based early intervening services.
• ensuring monitoring of student progress and data-based documentation for each student.
• reporting annual yearly progress which gives evidence of the accelerated growth of struggling readers.
• providing the highest quality of professional development for teachers of low achievers.
• creating a multi-tiered problem-solving team to support comprehensive literacy efforts.

The revised IDEA legislation allows the use of response to intervention (RTI) as an alternate method for identifying children with learning disabilities. IDEA 2004 also permits local agencies to use funds for early intervening services (EIS) (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). These changes in the law offer ways for districts to respond to rising LD enrollments.

Response to intervention encourages early identification and pre-referral intervention to determine if a child responds to the intervening instruction. The goal is to limit referrals based on inadequate instruction or limited English proficiency and to reduce the number of children identified for LD services. Reduction of referrals and placements yields major cost savings to the education system.

Early intervening services are intended to reduce referrals that could have been avoided by regular educational interventions. Under IDEA, school districts may use as much as 15% of special education monies to pay for qualifying early intervening services, including professional development for teachers. Early intervening services are required in local education agencies where special education referrals are significantly disproportionate based on race or ethnicity.
The United States Department of Education (USDE) does not require or endorse any particular model of RTI or EIS. State education agencies establish the criteria for identifying children with specific learning disabilities, and that criteria must permit local agencies to choose an RTI model. The options described above allow local school administrators to consider Reading Recovery as an EIS or RTI (Lose, 2005).

**Using Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura Within IDEA**

Reading Recovery is a highly effective short-term intervention of one-to-one tutoring for low-achieving first graders (www.readingrecovery.org). Students receive a half-hour lesson each school day for 12 to 20 weeks with a specially trained Reading Recovery teacher. As soon as students meet grade-level expectations and demonstrate that they can continue to make progress in the classroom, their lessons are discontinued and new students begin individual instruction.

Although state education agencies have authority in directing the use of IDEA funds, local education agencies can influence state decisions by presenting alternatives that meet the intent of the legislation. Three ways to include Reading Recovery within the constructs of the IDEA legislation are suggested below.

**Reading Recovery as a prereferral intervention—EIS and RTI**

For more than 20 years, Reading Recovery has successfully served as a prereferral intervention for more than 1.6 million children in the United States. Reading Recovery demonstrates the two positive outcomes (see Jones, Johnson, Schwartz, & Zalud, 2005) envisioned by IDEA legislation, specifically response to intervention:

- **Positive Outcome One**
  The child demonstrates grade-level performance as a result of the response to intervention and is not referred and placed in LD reading or writing. The child continues to achieve with high-quality classroom instruction. Across the United States, 75% of children who complete the Reading Recovery intervention achieve this outcome.

- **Positive Outcome Two**
  The child makes progress but does not reach grade-level standards. Across the United States, 25% of children with complete Reading Recovery interventions fall into this category. A team of educators in the school determines the next positive actions for the child, aided by information gathered during Reading Recovery lessons.

Both outcomes of the RTI model proposed in Figure 1 are positive because they benefit the child and the school. National data for 2005–2006 show that only 1% of the first graders with complete Reading Recovery interventions were placed in LD reading or writing at the end of Grade 1 (National Data Evaluation Center, 2006).

The RTI model in Figure 1 is based on planned prevention, with classroom instruction as the primary interven-
tion and Reading Recovery as the secondary intervention. Reading Recovery provides an intensive intervention as soon as problems are detected — before difficulties become habituated and difficult to change. Children are identified in Grade 1; they are taught by Reading Recovery teachers with high levels of expertise in working with children who struggle with literacy learning.

Intensive intervention needs to be individually designed and individually delivered for children to quickly catch up with their peers. In the same way that a medical diagnosis is rendered individually, only one-to-one teaching can both identify a reader’s individual difficulties and work on specific strengths. Although some researchers claim that small groups achieve the same outcomes, many studies on which these claims are based are flawed (see Schmitt, Askew, Fountas, Lyons, & Pinnell, 2005, pp. 76–77; Reading Recovery Council of North America, 2006).

Evidence favoring one-to-one interventions is strong. The USDE Institute of Education Sciences (IES) identified one-to-one tutoring by qualified tutors in Grades 1–3 as meeting the gold standard of research, meaning outcomes found to be effective in randomized controlled trials (IES, 2003, p. iii). Many other researchers have documented the importance of individual lessons for the lowest achievers at the onset of schooling (Pinnell, Lyons, DeFord, Bryk, & Seltzer, 1994; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Vellutino, Scanlon, Sipay, Small, & Pratt, 1996; Wasik & Slavin, 1993).
vulnerable literacy learners. The following examples illustrate how some districts have used Reading Recovery professional development to support struggling readers and to build teacher expertise:

• Reading Recovery teachers use their skills to provide one-to-one instruction so that children can reach grade-level performance in reading and writing, reducing referrals to special education and other long-term services. For part of the day, most Reading Recovery teachers also work with children in classrooms or groups, thus contributing broadly to the school program.

• Special education teachers are given two assignments: Reading Recovery for half of the school day and LD for the remainder of the day. These teachers complete the regular Reading Recovery training and continue to work in a split assignment in subsequent years. They participate in ongoing Reading Recovery professional development and use their expertise with all children served.

• Special education teachers complete the yearlong Reading Recovery training (with released time for Reading Recovery teaching during the training year). After the full year of training, these teachers may return to full-time special education roles, using their sound foundation in literacy teaching and learning to benefit all the children they serve.

The influence of Reading Recovery professional development builds capacity for literacy expertise and leadership in general education and special education.

What Can Administrators and Policymakers Do?
Make a plan to include or expand Reading Recovery in the response to intervention model in your schools. If necessary, work with officials at the state department/agency to make your case. Use the following rationales to support the importance of Reading Recovery as a key component of your plan.

Implementation of Reading Recovery provides

• a cost-effective investment in the prevention of literacy failure for first graders, reducing long-term costs of educating struggling learners and allowing special education resources to be allocated on the basis of highest need.

• a scientific, research-based intervention (Schmitt et al., 2005).

• high-quality professional development for the teachers of the lowest achievers (year-long intensive course work).

• a multi-tiered problem-solving approach to literacy learning, involving a comprehensive team and close collaboration between general and special education.


• a short-term (12–20 weeks) intensive one-to-one intervention with documented evidence of its effectiveness.

A Comprehensive Literacy Plan Yields Positive Results

A comprehensive literacy effort in the Adel-Desoto-Minburn School District (ADM) in Iowa has yielded positive results for children. The plan included Reading Recovery implementation, a classroom literacy initiative, reconfiguration of the Title I reading program, and a commitment to train special education teachers in Reading Recovery. Although the trained special education teachers do not continue as Reading Recovery teachers, the professional development enables them to provide high-quality reading instruction for students ultimately placed in special education interventions. All stakeholders work as a team on behalf of children struggling with literacy learning.
Implementation

(www.ndec.us; Schmitt et al., 2005).

• an intensive period of
diagnostic teaching to inform
the school team as they make
recommendations based on
the needs of each child.

• systematic monitoring of each
child’s progress and national
reporting of outcomes for
every child served
(www.ndec.us).

• a reduction of the achieve-
ment gap for low-achieving
children, for minority and
low-income children, and
children who are English
language learners (Kelly,
Gómez-Bellengé, Chen, &
Schulz, 2005; Neal & Kelly,
1999; Rodgers, Gómez-
Bellengé, Wang, & Schulz,
2005).

• a systematic framework that
includes standards for effec-
tive implementation and
ongoing support from a
network of Reading Recovery
professionals at universities
across the United States.

The passage of IDEA with the prom-
ise of response to intervention (RTI)
expands the role of Reading Recovery
in schools. The key to literacy success
is embedded within a comprehensive
plan that includes Reading Recovery
for the most-vulnerable first graders.

When professionals and parents
work together on behalf of the lowest-
literacy achievers in Grade 1,
everyone benefits — children and
their families, teachers, schools, and
the community. By including
Reading Recovery in your planning,
you can ensure early success that will
make a difference for children.

For more information, visit our
website at www.readingrecovery.org

References

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Bell, M. (2005). Reading teachers play key role in successful response to intervention
approaches. International Reading
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Bueker, C. S. (2004). Examining the cost-
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one urban district. Cambridge, MA:
The Center for Reading Recovery and
Literacy Collaborative at Lesley
University. Available online at
http://www.lesley.edu/crr/rr_research.html

Essential Information About Reading Recovery

1. Reading Recovery is based on scientifically based
reading research (SBRR) and has more than 20
years of evaluation data to support short-term and
long-term effectiveness.

2. Assessments used in Reading Recovery are valid and
reliable for identifying the lowest-achieving children
and for monitoring their progress.

3. One-to-one teaching is economical for at least three
reasons: The intervention is short-term; most chil-
dren continue to make progress with their class-
mates without needing long-term help; and Reading
Recovery teachers’ skills are available to many other
children in the school setting.

4. The USDE does not mandate or endorse a particu-
lar RTI model although undocumented claims are
made by some agencies to suggest preference for a
three-tier model that would prohibit individual
instruction. That prohibition does not meet the
intent of the legislation and ignores substantial
research supporting individual interventions.

5. Reading Recovery is based on a complex view of the
reading process. Reading Recovery professionals
acknowledge the importance of the phonological
aspects of learning to read; they attend to letters,
sounds, and words. Relying on a single factor in
literacy instruction, however, cannot meet the needs
of all children, especially those who are struggling
with literacy learning (NICHD, 2000). Learning to
read is a complex process that requires a skilled and
knowledgeable teacher who makes decisions about
appropriate teaching moves for each individual
child.

6. Reading Recovery reduces the gap between low
achievers and their average classmates; reduces the
gap between African American and White children
and poor and middle class students; reduces the
achievement gap of disadvantaged urban children;
and yields positive benefits for non-native English
speakers.


Reading Recovery Council of North America (2006, December). *One-to-one instruction is superior to small-group intervention for struggling young readers: It makes a difference.* Available online at www.readingrecovery.org/pdfs/OnetoOnebrief06.pdf


Additional Resources on the Internet

**Council of Administrators of Special Education:**
http://www.ccasec.org/rti.htm

**Council for Exceptional Children Web seminars:**
http://www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ProfessionalDevelopment/ProfessionalTraining/WebSeminars/default.htm

**IRA Focus on Response to Intervention:**
http://www.reading.org/resources/issues/focus_riti.html

**National Association of State Directors of Special Education, RTI Project Page:**
http://www.nasdse.org/projects.cfm?pageprojectid=23