Scaling Up Reading Recovery: Two Years of Remarkable Outcomes

Emily Rodgers, Trainer, The Ohio State University
Jerome V. D’Agostino, Research Director, International Data Evaluation Center

In October 2010, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Innovation awarded a 5-year, $45 million Investing in Innovation (i3) grant to The Ohio State University to scale up Reading Recovery across the United States. All university training centers (UTCs) in the U.S. are partners on the grant and helped raise an additional $10.3 million in matching funds from generous donors and foundations. From the grant’s beginning, funds from both the private sector and the federal government have been used to support most of the professional development costs of training 3,690 new teachers in Reading Recovery so that over 88,700 children will receive the intervention, and an additional 396,000 children will be taught during the other part of the teachers’ day.

The overarching goal of this project is to provide intensive, long-term professional development for teachers who will teach students in first grade having the greatest difficulty learning to read and write. Children who are selected for Reading Recovery lessons are those reading well below grade level. Annual evaluations of student progress demonstrate consistently good results: Nearly 80% of the children who receive the intervention will progress to read and write at average levels within 12–20 weeks of instruction. Those who do not make accelerated progress can more reliably be referred on for further assessment and a more-intensive intervention.

Reading Recovery has gone through a 26-year period of development and validation—producing the largest impacts on student reading skills of any intervention reviewed by the What Works Clearinghouse—making it one of the most-promising reading interventions for scale up. Although Reading Recovery has over 20 years of experience working with struggling readers across the U.S., this grant offers a unique and innovative opportunity to provide highly trained literacy experts in all schools across the country, but with particular priority given to very low-performing schools, schools in rural areas, and schools with high populations of English language learners.

In this report we provide an update on project activities near the midway point of the grant as we start Year 3. We describe progress to date in scaling up Reading Recovery, with a particular focus on our progress in rural schools, and then we share some early results from the external evaluation of Reading Recovery.

Scaling Up Reading Recovery: Progress to the Beginning of Year 3

By the end of Year 2 of the i3 grant, 1,200 teachers were trained in Reading Recovery and 856 more teachers were enrolled to start the training in Year 3; a total of 2,056 new U.S. teachers. This figure brings us very close to our project goal of training 2,205 teachers by the end of Year 3.

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partners across the country. They join approximately 400 already trained teacher leaders to provide professional development to teachers who are designing and delivering Reading Recovery lessons in schools across the country.

All U.S. schools—including public, private, parochial, and charter schools—are eligible for i3 funding to train teachers in Reading Recovery. By the beginning of Year 3 in October 2012, Reading Recovery had been implemented in 702 schools in our Priority One, or highest need, category. They include 9 schools on their state’s School Improvement Grant list, 97 schools in either ‘restructuring’ or ‘corrective action,’ 190 schools in rural districts, and 406 schools with a sizable population of English language learners. Our Priority Two includes Title I schools that are in ‘program improvement’ or in a district that is in program improvement; 198 schools in this category trained teachers in Reading Recovery. An additional 473 schools have trained teachers in Reading Recovery since the beginning of the grant.

**Progress with Priority One Schools: Spotlight on Schools in Rural Areas**

According to the Rural School and Community Trust’s report, Why Rural Matters, 2011–12 (Strange, Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2012), nearly 10 million students were enrolled in rural school districts across the country — approximately 20% of the nation’s total public school enrollment in 2008–09. The need for high-quality professional development in rural schools is acute for several reasons. We know that children who are living in poverty are more likely to be living in a rural area than an urban or suburban one, more likely to be struggling with reading in the early grades, and more likely to drop out of school later on. We also know that poor rural schools have a more-difficult time attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers, and this is critical because teacher expertise is directly related to student achievement.

The good news is that 25% of our Priority One schools are in rural districts. This is important because it means that fully one-quarter of the schools in the grant’s top priority for funding are schools in rural areas; a figure that is slightly greater in proportion than the 2008–09 enrollment of students in rural schools across the country. Even better, 44% of all schools with Reading Recovery in 2011–12 (regardless of funding source for training) were located in small towns or rural areas across the country (D’Agostino, 2012). Rural schools are well represented in the i3 grant to scale up Reading Recovery.

**A Commitment to Reach Teachers in Rural Areas**

University partners with the grant are committed to understanding and meeting the unique challenges of schools in rural districts. In June 2012, focus group interviews were conducted with the university partners that are having good success scaling up Reading Recovery in rural districts. The goal was to learn more about the challenges and affordances of working in more geographically dispersed areas, and to share ways the UTC partners have been recruiting schools in rural areas. These ideas about successfully scaling up in rural areas were shared as part of an invited presentation to all i3 projects at the Office of Innovation’s annual i3 meeting in July 2012.

In August 2012, The Ohio State University began a formal study of a distant model of teacher training — one that was piloted during the previous school year. The goal of the model is to make Reading Recovery training accessible to teachers who live great distances from the nearest teacher training center.
Disaggregated Outcomes for Students in Rural Areas

According to the most-recent national report for Reading Recovery in the U.S. (D’Agostino, 2012), teachers taught 53,282 children in Reading Recovery in rural, urban, and suburban schools across the country in 2011–12. Of all students who had an opportunity for a full series of lessons (for example, did not move to another school during the intervention), 73.6% (n = 30,684) made accelerated progress and reached average levels of reading and writing within the 20-week intervention. The remaining 26.4% (n = 11,063) could be more reliably referred on for further testing and recommendation for a more-intensive intervention. How did the children who were in rural schools fare in comparison to the total group of students who received Reading Recovery lessons in 2011–12?

Locale data were available from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data for 47,073 of all children who were selected for Reading Recovery lessons. Of those children, 44% (n = 20,784) attended schools in rural or small-town areas. An analysis of the disaggregated data shows that children in rural areas outperformed the total group of all students who received Reading Recovery lessons (see figure below). Most notably, 75% of children in rural or small-town locales reached average levels of reading and writing, compared to 73.6% of the whole group. These children in rural areas were reading a text level of 19.8 on average at the end of first grade, compared to a text level of 18.9 for children in urban areas and 19.3 for those in suburban areas.

Teachers who participate in Reading Recovery training become experts in designing and delivering literacy instruction to young struggling readers, and the professional development will have an impact on the rest of the school day when they are teaching in the classroom or small groups of students. This professional knowledge will remain long after the grant is finished, leaving a lasting positive impact on rural schools, their teachers, and students.

External Evaluation: Summary of Early Results

Dr. Henry May of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), who is leading the external evaluation of the scale up, provided a summary of early results from the first year of the study (May, 2012). The external evaluation is a rigorous randomized experiment and as such, will likely meet the high qualifications of a study approved by the What Works Clearinghouse once it is submitted for review. Several hundred schools and more than 1,000 children nationwide are participating in the study — making it the largest study of its kind to be conducted.

Early results from CPRE’s external evaluation reveal highly statistically significant positive effects on students’ ITBS raw scores in reading and comprehension with an average impact on ITBS reading raw scores of .55 standard deviations and .63 standard deviations for comprehension raw scores. When converted to grade equivalents, the effects of Reading Recovery in this study equal an additional 1 to 2 months.
One of the great achievements of the grant has been the implementation of the most-extensive experiment of Reading Recovery; in fact it might well be considered one of the largest and most-rigorous studies of early literacy to date.

For more information about how to access i3 funds to train a teacher in Reading Recovery, visit this website: www.i3.readingrecovery.org.

References


May, H. (2012, September). Early results from the 2011–12 evaluation of the i3 scale up of Reading Recovery. Presentation at the meeting of the Reading Recovery North American Trainers Group, Columbus, OH.