Independent School District 196 in Rosemount, MN, is celebrating 20 years of Reading Recovery lessons. Teacher Leader Teresa Douglas, who helped compile this feature, said more than 7,200 students have had Reading Recovery lessons, and the majority have maintained or exceeded average levels.

Reading Recovery teacher remembers Austin

As our school district began to formulate plans to celebrate 20 years of Reading Recovery service to first graders, one of our Reading Recovery teachers coincidentally met the parents of a former Reading Recovery student at her church. To my delight and surprise that student—Austin Pickup—was one of my first-round students in the fall of 2001.

When I first started working with Austin I noticed that he was sometimes shy and quiet during Roaming Around the Known and early lessons. Austin had been in a strong literacy-based kindergarten environment, so he entered Reading Recovery knowing how to write a few words and to hear and record some sounds in words. He could not recognize the words he knew how to write when they appeared in text. He had a strong ability to predict or invent text while ignoring words he knew how to write when they appeared in text.

Learning to look at print and connecting letters to sounds in text were a challenge to Austin. As lessons continued I worked to increase his writing vocabulary and helped him to monitor and self-correct using what he knew from writing to link to reading. Finding just the right new book for Austin in every lesson was critical. As time went on, his classroom teacher noticed that he was accelerating in his text level and was more excited to read each day. I continued to praise and support his gains when I saw more risk-taking and independence in both reading and writing. He became so comfortable in our lessons that he liked to stop and chat, so I had to remind him to save all chatting until our lesson was over. Austin continued to accelerate in text level and writing. His parents were very supportive in listening to him read each day.

Austin had become a risk taker who was actively engaged in print each day. His classroom teacher felt he was reading in the average range in his classroom, and after visiting his classroom, I agreed. Austin discontinued after 71 lessons, and he loved to read his books every day. He was a smiling, happy participant in his classroom and continued to accelerate throughout the year. Reading Recovery helped Austin fill in his gaps and sort out his confusions. It provided him the tools to be a lifelong learner, and I was so pleased to be the one to help him.

Kathleen Holmhdahl-Bendlin, retired teacher leader
Rosemount/Apple Valley/Eagan, MN Site

Austin’s father writes to the superintendent
Dear Dr. Berenz,

Our son, Austin Pickup, is a senior at Eastview High School. As I’m sure your records will confirm, Austin has been a very good student. The most recent report we received was that his Honors Ranking at Eastview is #21 of 541 students, placing Austin in the top 4% of his class. As you might imagine, we are very proud of his accomplishments and are optimistic that his success will continue into college and beyond.

The reason I’m writing to you is to express our gratitude for the overall experience Austin has had in District 196. As mentioned above, he has been an exemplary student.
at Eastview High School, but his high school transcripts, as impressive as they are, do not tell the whole story. His experience may have been quite different if not for some help he received back in first grade. In 2001–2002, Austin was a student at Oakridge Elementary School in Eagan, and was falling behind his classmates in reading skills. He was not able to recognize sounds and letters as readily as others, and this had an impact on his overall learning experience. Fortunately, Austin was offered some time one-on-one with Mrs. Holmdahl, the Reading Recovery specialist. The Reading Recovery program worked wonderfully, and soon Austin was not only able to catch up to his classmates, but to surpass them in his reading ability. The focused attention from Mrs. Holmdahl and Reading Recovery helped to unleash Austin’s potential as a student, and helped him to be the eager and successful student that he is today.

In June, Austin will graduate from Eastview High School, and we will join with other parents in congratulating our child on that milestone. We will also, however, reflect on the remarkable change in his life from the first grader who was behind his classmates to the senior who is a top student with unlimited potential and endless educational opportunities. We will forever be grateful not only for his ability, hard work, and success, but also for the extra help he received from Mrs. Holmdahl to get over that first academic hurdle.

Thank you to District 196 for the education you’ve provided! Austin’s experience at Eastview has been terrific, but the stage for his success was set with the Reading Recovery program at Oakridge Elementary. We hope that Mrs. Holmdahl and others who are responsible for Reading Recovery might be proud of Austin’s accomplishments, and would realize that their contributions to his education were significant. We want them to know that we remember and appreciate the role they played in Austin’s earliest academic successes. Thank you to District 196 and to Reading Recovery!

Walter and Darlene Pickup, proud parents of Austin

Austin tells his story
My name is Austin Pickup and I am a success story. As a late bloomer in several aspects, my academic journey has been riddled with setbacks and obstacles. I am now a senior in high school who has risen to be part of the top percentage of his class.

During the early years of my education I attended Oak Ridge Elementary School, where I was not the most adept student. My teacher recognized this and placed me in the Reading Recovery program with Mrs. Holmdahl. I would go to these sessions, and I remember doing various reading development activities. It consisted usually of me reading a story, answering some questions, and having a great time with the teacher.

I know for a fact that I loved Reading Recovery. Thinking about this class brings back excited feelings of nostalgia. A large part of this might have been that I received attention others didn’t when they pulled me out of class.

Eventually I grew up and graduated out of the program. I could read at the same pace as the other kids, and my development really started kicking in. As I moved through the grades, the stepping stones I was given as a first grader propelled my learning, and I surpassed my peers. I moved from the bottom of the class, to the middle, and now—as a senior in high school—it has snowballed to the point where I am in the top 5% of Eastview High School. I excel in most subjects, and my reading scores are far above average. Today, I am an articulate young man excited about learning and capable of doing so. For this reason, I am thankful for everything I received as a struggling young student. I’m glad I wasn’t forgotten or left behind. I was boosted when it mattered most, and I will continue to make the most of it.

Austin is in the top 5% of his graduating class and thankful for the help he received as a struggling young reader.