



# Briefing Paper

Reading Recovery® Council of North America

## Learning Disabilities and Reading Recovery

*To render a diagnosis of specific reading disability in the absence of early and labor-intensive remedial reading that has been tailored to the child's individual needs is, at best, a hazardous and dubious enterprise, given all of the stereotypes attached to this diagnosis.*

— Vellutino et al., 1996, p. 632

*Reading Recovery should clear out of the remedial education system those who don't learn to read for many event-produced reasons and those with "organically caused problems" but who can be taught to read and write independently despite this, leaving a small group of children still requiring specialist attention.*

— Clay, 1987, p. 169

An International Reading Association publication (Long, 1995) identified Reading Recovery as an intervention that not only teaches children how to read but also reduces the number of students who are labeled learning disabled (LD) and the number of students who are placed in remedial reading programs.

As part of a comprehensive literacy plan, Reading Recovery has successfully served as a pre-referral intervention for more than 1.6 million children in the United States to date ([www.readingrecovery.org](http://www.readingrecovery.org), [www.ndec.us](http://www.ndec.us)). For children with complete Reading Recovery interventions, national data show that at the end of Grade 1, only 1% are placed in learning disabilities settings for literacy and 5% await screening (Gómez-Bellengé & Rodgers, 2006).

### Prevents Inappropriate Referrals to Special Education

Based on a prevention model, Reading Recovery limits referrals to special education by distinguishing between children who are learning disabled and children whose difficulties are related to experience and instruction. Reading Recovery demonstrates the two positive outcomes envisioned by the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, IDEIA) specifically response to intervention (RTI).

#### *Positive Outcome One*

The child demonstrates grade-level performance as a result of the intervention and is not referred and placed in LD reading or writing. The child continues to achieve with high-quality classroom instruction. Approximately 75% of the 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 U.S., 25% of children with complete Reading Recovery interventions fall into this category. A team of educators in the school determine the next positive actions for the child, aided by information gathered during Reading Recovery lessons.

### Reduces Referrals to Special Education

Several studies have documented that Reading Recovery does in fact reduce the numbers of students referred for more specialized attention.

- A study of 11 New York City districts found that children served by Reading Recovery were referred at a statistically significant lower rate in later grades than low achievers who did not have Reading Recovery lessons (O'Connor & Simic, 2002).
- A Massachusetts district netted savings of \$1,262,874 for costs associated with retention, special education, and Title I placement (Assad & Condon, 1996).
- An Ohio district reduced costs of retentions and dramatically reduced the number of children classified as learning disabled, realizing a considerable cost savings (Lyons & Beaver, 1995).

### Prepares Highly Trained Teachers

The International Reading Association report on learning disabilities (Long, 1995) suggests that Reading Recovery's staff development model of ongoing, intensive training is integral to the ability to achieve this reduction. The intensive

training means that Reading Recovery teachers are equipped "...to be more discriminating when classifying students who need more support" (p. 11).

Reading Recovery is a compelling option for schools that are designing response to intervention (RTI) models to meet the needs of struggling readers and writers. For information about how Reading Recovery fits into an RTI model, see "Reading Recovery and IDEA Legislation: Early Intervening Service (EIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI)," at [www.readingrecovery.org](http://www.readingrecovery.org).

### References

- Assad, S., & Condon, M. A. (1996). Demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of Reading Recovery: Because it makes a difference. *Reading Recovery Network News*, 10–14.
- Clay, M. M. (1987). Learning to be learning disabled. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 22(2), 155–173.
- Gómez-Bellengé, F. X., & Rodgers, E. M. (2006). *Reading Recovery and Descubriendo la Lectura national report 2004–2005* (NDEC Report No. 2006-04). Columbus: The Ohio State University, National Data Evaluation Center.
- Long, R. (1995). *Learning disabilities — A barrier to literacy instruction*. Washington, DC: International Reading Association.
- Lyons, C. A., & Beaver, J. (1995). Reducing retention and learning disability placement through Reading Recovery: An educationally sound cost-effective choice. In R. Allington & S. Wamsley (Eds.), *No quick fix: Redesigning literacy programs in America's elementary schools* (pp. 116–136). New York: Teachers College Press and the International Reading Association.
- O'Connor, E. A., & Simic, O. (2002). The effect of Reading Recovery on special education referrals and placements. *Psychology in the Schools*, 39(6), 635–646.
- Vellutino, F. R., Scanlon, D. M., Sipay, E. R., Small, S. G., & Pratt, A. (1996). Cognitive profiles of difficult-to-remediate and readily remediated poor readers: Early intervention as a vehicle for distinguishing between cognitive and experiential deficits as basic causes of specific reading disability. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88(4), 601–638.



Reading Recovery® Council  
of North America

614-310-READ  
[www.readingrecovery.org](http://www.readingrecovery.org)