

# Reading Recovery® in Michigan 2002-2003

## An Oakland University Executive Summary



### Introduction

Reading Recovery® is a short-term early literacy intervention designed for first grade children having extreme difficulty learning to read and write. Children meet individually with a specially trained teacher for 30 minutes daily. The intensive instruction ranges from 12-20 weeks. Most children served by Reading Recovery make accelerated progress and meet grade level expectations in reading and writing. They develop effective reading and writing strategies that enable them to continue learning independently in the classroom. Reading Recovery can also serve as a pre-referral program for a small number of children who may need specialized longer-term help.

### Reading Recovery

- **Reading Recovery is based on scientific reading research.** Reading Recovery is built on a strong research base across several decades. Evaluation data are collected annually on every child. Reading Recovery incorporates the essential components of effective reading instruction identified by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency.
- **Reading Recovery is not a commercial program.** The not-for-profit collaborative effort among schools, districts, and universities trains expert teachers to work with the lowest-achieving first graders.
- **Reading Recovery selects the lowest children for service first.** Teachers administer tasks published in *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 1993a/2002) to select the lowest children for service first; they use the assessment information to plan a series of lessons that capitalize on a child's strengths to overcome deficiencies.
- **Reading Recovery teachers are trained in a yearlong program and receive ongoing professional development.** Reading Recovery teachers participate in a year of training for which they receive university credit. During the training year, no service is lost to children because teachers begin to work with children and put their new knowledge into actions continuously.
- **Reading Recovery teachers work with the lowest performing readers and serve in a variety of instructional roles.** Reading Recovery teachers provide 4 thirty-minute lessons per day and can serve 8 to 12 at-risk students per year in this half-time role. During the other half of their teaching day they apply their expertise while working with as many as 25 to 40 additional students in their other teaching roles as classroom teacher, literacy specialist, ELL teacher, or special educator.
- **Reading Recovery teachers are highly qualified.** The professional development and continuing education that are hallmarks of Reading Recovery assure the quality of the program and provide the basis for continuous quality improvement as outlined in federal legislation.

### A Brief History

Developed in New Zealand by Marie Clay, Reading Recovery began in the United States in 1984 at The Ohio State University. Now in 49 states, Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, and Department of Defense schools, Reading Recovery serves nearly 140,000 students in more than 3,000 school districts and 9,800 schools annually. More than one million U.S. children have been served to date.

Since 1991 Western Michigan University and Oakland University trained groups of teacher leaders and teachers. Beginning in fall 2003, Oakland University will serve Reading Recovery professionals across Michigan. Oakland University

trainers provide year-long training for teacher leaders who return to districts or consortia to train and support teachers. Oakland University trainers provide training, ongoing professional development, implementation support to sites, and annual evaluations of program data. Since 1991, Reading Recovery has served over 61,000 Michigan first graders.

### Reading Recovery in Michigan 2002-2003

**Description** – During the 2002-03 school year, Michigan Reading Recovery professionals served 8,198 of the lowest-achieving first graders in the state. This was achieved through the support of 31 teacher training sites and 44 teacher leaders serving 193 school districts and 668 schools. Of the 940 teachers working in Reading Recovery, 97 were in their training year.

**Demographics** – Reading Recovery children in Michigan represented a diverse population: 75% were White, 16% African-American, 5% Hispanic/Latino, 1% Asian, 1% Native American, and 2% multi ethnic. Eight percent were second-language learners. Among Reading Recovery children for whom we have lunch data, 40% received a free or reduced lunch.

**Results** – Reading Recovery reports the progress of all children served, even those who received incomplete interventions. Fifty-eight percent of all children served by Reading Recovery successfully completed the program, having met grade level expectations in reading and in writing and 17% were referred for further support after receiving a full program of 20 weeks. Approximately 16% did not receive a full intervention for a variety of reasons. **Among the 6,200 children who received a full series of lessons, 78% were discontinued and reached grade level reading proficiency** (see Figure 1). The average length of an instructional program was 15 weeks for students that achieved grade level expectations.

Outcomes for Full Program Reading Recovery Children. N = 6200

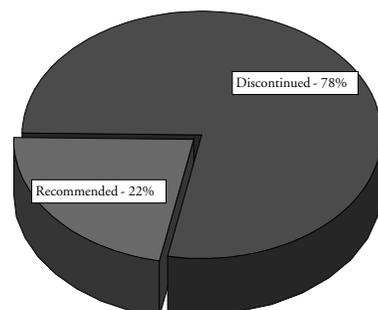
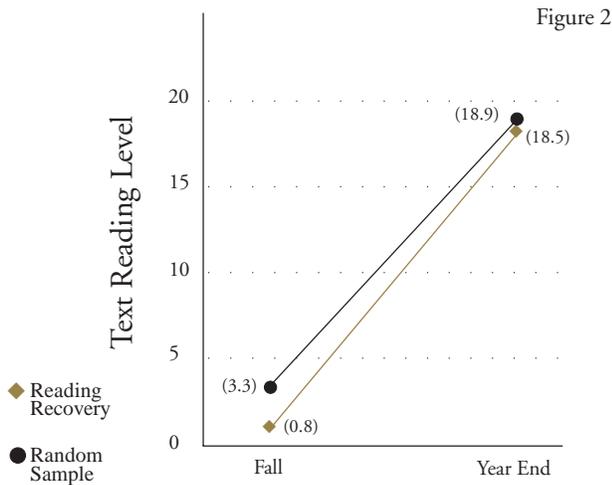


Figure 1

Research shows that low-achieving children in grade one are very likely to be low achieving in grade four. Conversely, first graders performing on average levels are likely to be average or above in fourth grade. Investing in early interventions like Reading Recovery is an investment for the future.

**Literacy Gains** – As part of the evaluation design, Reading Recovery children are compared to a group of randomly selected first graders at each site. Because Reading Recovery children start the school year with the lowest test scores, they must make higher gains than students in the Random Sample group to meet grade-level expectations by year-end. In 2002-2003, there was documented evidence of accelerated gains on all measures. Figure 2 shows that the discontinued children made higher gains than their average performing peers. They were able to ‘catch up’ and read on-level or above-level texts by the end of first grade.



**Classroom Reading Group Placement** – Another evaluation of success is classroom reading group placement. In the fall, classroom teachers rated students selected for the Reading Recovery intervention as the lowest readers in the class; 91% were placed in the Low reading group. However at the end of the year those same children resembled the Random Sample; their classroom teachers placed 80% in an average reading group.

**Closing the Achievement Gap** – Reading Recovery works for children of all backgrounds. Educators and policy makers are concerned about the “achievement gap” or differences in educational outcomes across children of different races and ethnicities. Disaggregated by race, a gap is evident between Michigan’s White and African-American students. Among the students in the Random Sample, African-American students start grade one reading slightly lower than White Students and this gap widens by year’s end. However there is evidence that African-American students served by Reading Recovery, initially the lowest performing students in Grade One, reverse that trend and close the achievement gap.

**Poverty** – Although their text reading scores were lower in the fall, Reading Recovery students whose programs were successfully discontinued and were among the poorest in terms of economic status category (free lunch) made greater gains in text reading (17.1 versus 12.9) than the Random Sample of comparison students in the same economic status category (free lunch).

**Support for Michigan and National Initiatives**

Reading Recovery plays an important role in state and national initiatives designed to “Leave No Child Behind.” Outcomes show that Reading Recovery dramatically reduces the number of children with reading difficulties and the costs related to educating those children.

**Implementation Factors**

Site-based decision-making is an integral part of Reading Recovery. All outcomes should be considered within the context of the implementation decisions made by districts. Known to contribute to positive outcomes are the level of coverage within a school and within a district, protection of time for teaching sessions, quality of teacher training, knowledge of administrators and classroom teachers, and ownership of the intervention by all stakeholders.

Michigan is still far from providing Reading Recovery to all children who need it. Many of the participating schools experience the impact of low coverage. Two out of three students in Michigan who need Reading Recovery do not have access to the intervention. Ideally 20% of our state’s first graders should have access. Policy makers and all who are concerned about leaving no child behind could achieve greater equity by providing the intervention to the 25,125 first graders that could benefit from Reading Recovery.

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Research evidence supports the need for early intervention to support these struggling readers. Research also shows that one-to-one rather than small-group instruction is essential for the accelerated progress of the lowest-performing first graders.

Reading Recovery has a strong track record of *preventing* literacy failure for many first graders. Results support the investment of resources in this prevention effort. Policy makers need to know which programs are successful in improving student outcomes in measurable ways. Reading Recovery meets the cost effectiveness test with student outcome data.

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**The Reading Recovery Center**  
**Oakland University**  
 School of Education and Human Services  
 490A Education Building  
 Rochester, MI 48309-4494  
 (248) 370-3054

**Reading Recovery Faculty**  
 Dr. Mary Lose, Director and Trainer  
 Dr. Robert Schwartz, Trainer  
 Dr. Lee Skandalaris, Trainer

This report was prepared by Dr. Mary K. Lose.