

**Reading First Update
July 2007**

TOPIC	SENATE APPROPRIATIONS REPORT 110-107 http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_cong_reports&docid=f:sr107.110.pdf	HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS REPORT 110-231 http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_cong_reports&docid=f:hr231.110.pdf
Reading Recovery	No specific language	p. 5 At the same time that the Department of Education was promoting certain reading products that lacked evidence of their validity, reading programs such as Reading Recovery and Success for All with strong evidence of effectiveness, according to the Department’s own what works clearinghouse, were virtually shut out of reading first. In fact, Department of Education data show that schools without Reading first funds were more likely to use Reading Recovery and Success for All—proven approaches—than were schools receiving reading first grants.
Administration-directed Earmarks	No specific language	p. 5 ...the Administration’s own fiscal year 2008 request for this bill includes a number of requests to earmark funds to certain organizations... The Executive Branch also engages in another practice which steers or directs money to specific entities or purposes through a process of providing grants or contracts to support various activities and services...
Reading First State Grants	<p>Funding - The Committee recommends \$800 million for the Reading First State Grants program a cut of over \$200 m. The comparable funding level for fiscal year 2007 was \$1,029 billion. The budget request is \$1,018,692,000.</p> <p>Commentary - The funding cut recommended by the Committee is in direct response to the Education Department’s egregious mismanagement of the program, as described in six reports by the Inspector General, numerous media accounts and congressional hearings. The Committee notes that Reading First was long touted by the administration as a model education program that awarded grants solely on the basis of solid scientific research and effectiveness. The Committee responded by providing more than \$5,000,000,000 for the program over the past 5 years, as the administration requested.</p> <p>Regrettably, it became clear that the Department and its contractors frequently ignored evidence of effectiveness while promoting certain programs that were favored by a few key individuals, some of whom had a financial interest in the programs’ success. In addition, Department officials flouted the No Child Left Behind Act by</p>	<p>Funding - The Committee recommends \$400 million for the Reading First State Grants program a cut of over 600 m. The comparable funding level for fiscal year 2007 was \$1,029 billion. The budget request is \$1,018,692,000.</p> <p>Commentary – Extensive commentary on pp. 225-6 (below).</p>

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	<p>interfering in State and local decisions regarding the selection of reading curricula. The Committee appreciates the Department's expressed willingness to correct its mistakes and restore the public's trust in its ability to administer Reading First. In the meantime, however, the Committee does not believe it would be appropriate to maintain funding for the program at its current level.</p>	
<p>Office of Inspector General (OIG) & Reading First</p>		<p>...between September 2006 and March 2007, the Department of Education Office of Inspector General (OIG) completed one of its most exhaustive investigations, which resulted in six separate audits of the reading first program. These audits documented efforts by the Department of Education to steer billions in reading first funds for the purchase of certain reading textbooks and assessments in order to benefit favored publishers and individuals. In September 2006, the Department of Education OIG found that the Department's program officials strongarmed States and school districts until they selected the reading textbooks and assessments favored by Administration officials. (Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Education, Final Inspection Report, The Reading First Program's Grant Application Process (2006)). After further investigation of reading first, the OIG found that Department of Education administrators improperly promoted commercial reading programs in potential violation of Federal law (Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Education, Final Inspection Report, The Department's Administration of Selected Aspects of the Reading First Program (2007)). For example, the Madison School District in Wisconsin had substantial data demonstrating that its students were learning at the rate that reading first was aiming for. Nonetheless, the district lost its \$2,000,000 reading first grant when the district would not purchase the unproven commercial reading program promoted by the Department of Education's contractors.</p> <p>Across the country, including in Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maine and New Jersey, States and districts with pro-grams that were not on the Department's preferential list were either rejected for grants or pressured to change their methods even though some argued, as did Wisconsin, that their programs met the law's standard. This is the type of pressure that the OIG found to be in potential violation of Federal law. Finally, the OIG found significant bias and conflicts of interest on the part of contractors and their subcontractors who were hired to provide unbiased technical assistance to States and school districts, potentially in violation of Federal law (Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Education, Final Inspection Report, RMC Research Corporation's Administration of Reading First Program Contracts (2007)).</p>

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Conflict of Interest	No specific language	<p>p. 275 In response to findings of serious conflicts of interest, bias, and violations of Federal law, the Committee has included a new provision to foster integrity and ethical values within the Department of Education. .. the bill requires the Secretary to implement procedures to vet conflicts of interest or bias among those who administer, or assist in the administration of, the Department’s programs. The provision also requires the Inspector General to certify to the Committee the adequacy of such procedures and to conduct at least one audit within one year to ensure that the procedures are properly implemented and that they have proven to be adequate.</p>
Title I funding increase	Title I funding increased by 8.3% - the largest increase in five years.	<p>Title I funding increased by 12% - the largest increase in the program’s history.</p> <p>The Committee’s recommended increase for title I should be used to support scientifically-based reading instruction for low-income, low-performing students most in need of those programs. The Committee expects the Department to take the necessary steps to ensure that high quality reading instruction is provided in all title I schools. The Committee prefers to support reading programs under title I rather than under reading first State grants because of its extreme dissatisfaction with the Department’s mismanagement of the reading first program which has resulted in serious conflicts of interest and violations of Federal law.</p>

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