

# Reading Recovery: The Optimal Response to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004

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On December 3, 2004, President Bush signed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) into law. A reauthorization of the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), IDEIA focuses on the education of children with disabilities and becomes effective July 1, 2005. Over the past months, the United States Department of Education (USDE) has invited commentary and has conducted hearings around the country to obtain recommendations on regulatory issues under the IDEIA. As a result of this input, the USDE will issue final regulations by December 3, 2005, to clarify details consistent with the intent of the law. I present here the principal provisions of the new IDEIA and the implications of the act for the children we serve in Reading Recovery. I also present a set of core points that can be used in the months ahead when advocating for Reading Recovery as an early intervening service under the IDEIA.

## Provisions of IDEIA

A major provision of the IDEIA is that it grants school districts the authority to make decisions for *early intervening services*, (also defined as *prereferral* or *general education interventions*), without the requirement that children be identified as learning disabled (LD). Currently and in the past, a child's eligibility for service required the establishment of a severe discrepancy between the child's intel-

lectual potential and his achievement in oral, listening or reading comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, or mathematics. The requirement to show such an achievement-potential discrepancy often results in delays in serving these children. Now under the IDEIA, school districts have an opportunity to offer early intervening services (EIS) to children and to evaluate their response to these services (also defined as *response to intervention* or RTI) without requiring labeling of children as LD. In addition, the IDEIA prohibits a school district from identifying a child as a child with a disability if this determination is based on a lack of appropriate

instruction in reading, math, or because of limited English proficiency.

A second provision of the IDEIA is the discretion it gives to school districts to spend 15% of their federal special education funds on professional development for teachers and on qualifying EIS. In order to be considered an EIS an intervention must be shown to have a scientific research foundation; this provision mirrors the requirement for scientifically based instruction in the No Child Left Behind Act. While the IDEIA appears to give local education agencies authority to determine whether an intervention is scientifically research-based, final regulations and guidance for implementation by



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Reading Recovery is the ideal response to the IDEIA's framework for early intervening services. It is designed to meet struggling students' literacy learning needs early while the potential for learning success is greatest, not later after they have experienced failure and feelings of low self-efficacy.

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the USDE will clarify details consistent with the intent of the law.

### Reading Recovery As An Effective and Efficient EIS

Reading Recovery is the ideal response to the IDEIA's framework for early intervening services. Reading Recovery is designed to meet struggling students' literacy learning needs early while the potential for learning success is greatest, not later after they have experienced failure and feelings of low self-efficacy. With Reading Recovery the majority of students can benefit from classroom instruction and build a solid foundation for later literacy learning (Clay, 2001). By moving children whose scores place them in the lower end of the achievement distribution into the average performance range, Reading Recovery reduces the subsequent costs of these children to the education system. Follow-up studies confirm that the majority of students served by Reading Recovery also maintain their achievement gains in later grades (Askew, et al., 2002; Brown, Denton, Kelly, & Neal, 1999; Hurry & Sylva, 1998; Pinnell, 1989; Rowe, 1995). For the very few children who do not

reach average performance levels as a result of participation in the intervention, Reading Recovery serves as a prereferral intervention for children who need longer-term specialist help (Askew, Fountas, Lyons, Pinnell, & Schmitt, 1998). (See article, Two Positive Outcomes of Reading Recovery, this issue.) Clearly, the IDEIA is in line with Reading Recovery practice to intervene early with those students most at-risk of literacy failure and who require additional instructional support to succeed to their potential.

Very importantly, the data collection process employed in Reading Recovery provides an essential component required in the IDEIA: Reading Recovery is well known for collecting data on every child served and for monitoring both the immediate and long-term outcomes of the intervention. Because of its philosophy, Reading Recovery has built a strong foundation of scientific research supporting the effectiveness of its intervention (see, Five Reading Recovery Studies: Meeting the Criteria for Scientifically Based Research, [www.rrcna.org](http://www.rrcna.org)).

In summary, requirements of the IDEIA provide increased flexibility to schools to provide research-validated services to low-achieving children early, without requiring prior identification of a child as having a disability. This provides those of us in Reading Recovery with an opportunity to advocate for the use of school district funds for Reading Recovery and to partner with special education leaders in school districts to provide Reading Recovery as a strong prereferral intervention. The following are core points you can use when talking to others:

- The IDEIA is placing current legislation in line with the long-term practice and philosophy of Reading Recovery to serve children without the need to label them LD or as a child with disabilities.
- Reading Recovery is a cost-effective use of funds which will become available under the IDEIA.
- Effective, early intervening services such as Reading Recovery will reduce the need for more expensive interventions later on.
- Reading Recovery is a short-term intervention and early intervening service that meets the criteria for a "scientifically research-based" intervention.
- Reading Recovery provides individually designed lessons with appropriate instruction in reading including the essential components of reading instruction as identified in the full report of the National Reading Panel (2000).
- Reading Recovery provides excellent training and professional development in reading instruction for teachers.

Currently guidelines are being written for the IDEIA by the USDE and will be available by December 2005. Obviously the success of the act depends on funding and how much money will actually be dispersed to schools. Even so, the provision for utilizing 15% of federal special education funds is a good next step, and allows schools to take advantage of Reading Recovery as their optimal early intervening service of choice.

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## About the Author



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