Scaling Up Reading Recovery to Better Meet the Needs of Students in Rural Schools
A 2012-2013 Report to The Rural School and Community Trust
Reading Recovery: Scaling Up What Works
The Ohio State University

In October 2010, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Innovation awarded a $45 million Investing in Innovation (i3) grant to The Ohio State University (OSU) to scale up Reading Recovery across the United States. In addition to the $45 million award, OSU and its partner university training centers worked together to raise the required 20% match amounting to just over $10 million from the private sector. From the grant’s beginning, funds from The Rural School and Community Trust have contributed greatly toward the purchase of professional books and books used with children in the Reading Recovery intervention and with children in the classroom or small groups.

Project Description: Scaling up Reading Recovery

The overarching goal of this project is to provide intensive, long-term professional development for teachers who will teach students in first grade having the greatest difficulty learning to read and write. Children who are selected for Reading Recovery lessons are reading well below grade level. Annual evaluations of student progress demonstrate consistently good results: nearly 80% of the children who receive the intervention will read and write at average levels within 12-20 weeks of instruction. Those who do not make accelerated progress can more reliably be referred on for further assessment.

The innovation, Reading Recovery, has gone through a 29-year period of development and validation, producing the largest impacts on student reading skills of any intervention reviewed by What Works Clearinghouse, making it one of the most promising reading interventions for scale up. Although Reading Recovery has over 20 years of experience working with struggling readers across the U.S., this grant offers a unique and innovative opportunity to provide highly trained literacy experts across the country, especially in rural areas.
The need for professional development in rural schools is acute for several reasons. We know that children who are living in poverty are more likely to be living in a rural area than an urban or suburban one, more likely to be struggling with reading in the early grades, and more likely to drop out of school later on. We also know that poor rural schools have a more difficult time attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers, and this is critical because teacher expertise is directly related to student achievement.

**Meeting Our Goals 2012-2013**

According to the Foundation’s report, Why Rural Matters, 2011-2012, nearly 10 million students were enrolled in rural school districts—approximately 20% of the nation’s total public school enrollment in 2008-09. The good news is that scale-up of Reading Recovery is near or greater than that rate, at all levels of impact.

- The grant has provided Reading Recovery training to 461 teachers in 313 schools in rural districts.
- In August 2012 we began a formal study of a blended model of teacher training that was piloted during the previous school year, and are now in the process of analyzing the data collected through May 2013. The goal of the blended model is to make Reading Recovery training accessible to teachers who live great distances from the nearest training center; typically these are teachers who work in rural areas. We are analyzing teacher and student outcomes to evaluate the success of that training model.
- The external evaluation of Reading Recovery led by Henry May, of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at the University of Pennsylvania, found that low-progress first graders in Reading Recovery are learning to read 120-166 percent faster than average first graders. As findings from the external evaluation continue to roll out, they will support strong causal inferences about the impact of Reading Recovery on the reading achievement of first grade students and their subsequent reading performance in the third and fourth grades.
- The i3 grant has also allowed Project Director and Professor Jerry D’Agostino and Co-director and Associate Professor Emily Rodgers to develop an iPad application called Letterworks for use in Reading Recovery lessons in place of the traditional magnetic letters. They used a mixed methods design to study the impact on letter learning and to examine teachers’ perceptions about the benefits and challenges of using technology in Reading Recovery lessons. Early findings suggest that there were no differences in letter learning for students who used the iPad from those who used traditional magnetic
letters. However, teachers who used the iPad reported that students appeared to be more motivated and engaged with letter learning and that letters on the iPad could be more easily manipulated. Perhaps a more important benefit is that including technology in Reading Recovery lessons promotes students’ e-literacy, which is particularly relevant for disadvantaged students who may not otherwise have access to an iPad.

**Addressing the Needs of Rural Communities and Schools**

A primary goal of the Rural School and Community Trust is to improve the quality of teachers and school leaders in rural places. The i3 grant to Scale-Up Reading Recovery addresses this goal by placing particular priority on funding teachers in rural schools and districts. According to Garreth Zalud, a professor and Reading Recovery trainer at the University of South Dakota, even though many rural schools are experiencing dire financial circumstances, they are committed to providing high-quality Reading Recovery intervention for children most in need; i3 funds meet this need by providing support for struggling first grade readers in rural schools through teacher training, materials and professional development.

Beyond individual and small group instruction, Reading Recovery teachers impact students during the other part of their school day as well. Dr. Annie Opat, Director of Reading Recovery at Emporia State University, notes that Reading Recovery trained teachers often become literacy leaders in their rural schools, and impact more students than those with whom they work individually. Zalud notes that many Reading Recovery teachers trained from i3 funds often split duties, teaching daily individual lessons to their Reading Recovery students as well as working with small groups of Title I children.

Dr. Opat describes the experience of one teacher leader in rural Kansas, Suzanne DeWeese, who “sees Reading Recovery instructional practices and language integrated into classroom instruction” further illustrating the school-wide impact that Reading Recovery training has on the quality of literacy teaching in rural schools. These observations from teachers and trainers illustrate two of the key findings from the grant’s external evaluation; many Reading Recovery teachers report their training to be transformative in terms of their own instruction and understanding about literacy, and Reading Recovery teachers are sharing their knowledge, strategies and information with others in their school.
Additionally, the i3 grant to Scale-Up Reading Recovery works toward the Rural School and Community Trust's mission of enhancing the relationship between quality schools and their communities. According to Opat, in rural areas "often the school system is the heart of the community, a place highly regarded and respected as school and community unite" within which Reading Recovery plays an instrumental role. Highland Park Elementary Broken Arrow, OK, a recipient of i3 funds, boasts that every child who received Reading Recovery lessons last year is still reading on grade level with their peers a year later. In rural schools similar to Highland Park, Reading Recovery students not only make accelerated progress in their reading, but also experience greater confidence and enthusiasm for learning according to parents and teachers. Therefore the relationship between schools and communities is enhanced as the number of first grade struggling readers is reduced, and costs associated with providing additional support for these students are reduced as well.

Summary

The i3 grant has provided many rural districts a unique opportunity to train Reading Recovery teachers to become experts in designing and delivering instruction to young struggling readers, and the professional development they receive will have an impact on the rest of the school day when they are teaching in the classroom or small groups of students. This professional knowledge will remain long after the grant is finished, leaving a lasting positive impact on rural communities through their schools, teachers and students.

IN THEIR WORDS…

i3 Reading Recovery Teachers in Rural Schools Reflect on Their Professional Development

“As a rookie Reading Recovery teacher, I feel as if my lessons are reciprocal. I seem to learn as much from my students as much as they learn from me.”
Angela Askin, Lillington Shawtown Elementary, Lillington, NC

“Reading Recovery has greatly impacted my teaching! I have completely changed the way I help children learn to read and the strategies I teach them to use. I feel like I have been given a gift…teaching children who struggle to read! What more could a teacher ask for?”
Jessica Fullenkamp, Ansonia Elementary, Ansonia, OH

“Reading Recovery has completely changed my professional work. Having come from a mostly first-grade background, I thought I knew how to teach reading, but going through the training has taught me so much about how to help those struggling readers. I really understand now how kids learn to read. I am more reflective of my teaching.”
Jennifer Snow, Baker Elementary School, Winchester, IN