

**New Jersey Literacy Initiatives: Reading First, Intensive Early Literacy,
the Governor’s new Reading Initiative (IDEAL)
and the Office of Special Education Programs’
Guidance on the Provision of Literacy Services
for Students with Disabilities**

Reading First, Intensive Early Literacy and the IDEAL (Initiative for the Development of Early Achievement in Literacy) are national and state initiatives to enable every child to become a successful reader. These efforts are based on high expectations for all students, including students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are among the subgroups that will be expected to make “annual yearly progress” in reading achievement as part of the No Child Left Behind requirements. Consistent with the expectations of Reading First, Intensive Early Literacy and the IDEAL Initiatives, all programs for students with disabilities, regardless of setting (general education class, resource center, special class programs) should be organized and implemented according to the following basic principles:

Tiered Assessment System

- A comprehensive, tiered assessment system including screening, ongoing assessment, diagnostic assessment and summative annual assessment of literacy learning should be in place for all students, including students with disabilities and ELL students.
- For all students in PreK through grade 3 programs, assessment of home language and, for those students from a non-English language background setting, an English language proficiency test by trained staff should be conducted to determine the appropriate language for literacy assessment and instruction to prevent inappropriate decisions about literacy proficiency or instructional needs.
- The system should begin with periodic screening (2-3 times per year) for all students in Kindergarten through grade 3 programs in all areas of literacy learning – phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Periodic screening is a first step in identifying students who may be at high risk for reading difficulties and who require further instruction in certain areas of literacy development. Screening may also be used as one indicator to determine the need for further assessment to determine specific difficulties in literacy learning, small group interventions and/or referral for special education services.
- The system should also include ongoing, classroom-based assessment aligned with the NJCCS and district curriculum to closely monitor performance and progress in literacy learning and provide for adjustments in instructional practices. Students with disabilities may require closer monitoring and more frequent individual assessment of student performance, within the context of classroom literacy activities, than the recommended 6 to 10 weeks to determine the responsiveness of students with disabilities to instruction and to make needed changes in instructional practice.

Tiered Assessment System (continued)

- Summative assessment using state and/or state approved norm-referenced or criterion referenced tests that are not part of the district comprehensive reading program should also be conducted on an annual basis. The results of these assessments should be used to assist in determining instructional priorities and informing grouping decisions for the coming year.
- For students who continue to function below grade level in literacy learning and for whom literacy learning is their primary area of difficulty, individual diagnostic assessment of literacy learning may be required. The purpose of this diagnostic assessment would be to identify specific areas of strengths and weaknesses in literacy learning in order to provide more targeted intervention within general education programs prior to referral for special education services.

Additional Assessment Considerations for Students With Disabilities

- Each student's disability should be considered in the selection, use and interpretation of diagnostic and progress monitoring assessment procedures. The nature of a student's disability can influence performance on assessment tasks.
- When administering standardized, diagnostic, progress monitoring or summative assessments to students with disabilities, the individuals responsible for **administering these assessments should be knowledgeable of the students' disabilities and testing accommodations included in students' IEPs.**

Access to Reading First, Intensive Early Literacy Programs and IDEAL

- Students with disabilities must have access to the Reading First, IEL, or the IDEAL district selected comprehensive reading program (CRP), materials and assessments, as well as supplementary services provided to other students (e.g. tutoring, Saturday Academies, Summer Programs).
- Students with disabilities should participate in literacy instruction within general education programs as their first placement option, receiving necessary supports and services within these settings, including modifications to instruction, materials and/or assessments, as needed, to further their literacy development. A key benefit of participation within general education settings is the variety and richness of language and literacy experiences with nondisabled peers that is difficult to replicate within segregated settings.
- Students with disabilities in K-3 programs, regardless of their placement, must be provided **a minimum of 90 minutes** of uninterrupted literacy instruction using a variety of grouping formats and activities. The predominant instructional format should be small group and/or individual instruction for at least 60 of the 90 minute block. According to Abbott Regulations, by 2006-7, all students in grades 4 through 8, including students with disabilities, should receive **80 to 120 minutes** of uninterrupted literacy instruction. Some students with disabilities may, in fact, require more instructional time than that provided for students

Access to Reading First, Intensive Early Literacy Programs and IDEAL (continued)

without disabilities in order to benefit from instruction and make progress in literacy development. When instruction includes a variety of grouping formats and activities during the literacy block, it is anticipated that only in rare cases will a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) require an adjustment to time due to difficulties in sustaining attention or other difficulties that arise from his/her disability. In these instances, the IEP should include alternative means for providing at least equivalent literacy instructional time during the day.

- When the IEP specifies "in-class" support instruction for reading/literacy, it is assumed that the in-class support teacher will be present during the entire literacy period of instruction. In instances when the "in-class" support teacher is not needed during the entire block of instruction, the IEP must specify the amount of time the in-class support is needed.
- Students with disabilities may demonstrate a broad range of learning behaviors that negatively impact both the acquisition of one or more components of the reading process and reading proficiency (e.g. difficulty in sustaining attention, impulsivity, inadequate self-monitoring, inadequate associations and connections, auditory or visual processing difficulties, inadequate retention, etc.). Consequently, students with disabilities must have access to **a variety of instructional and assessment strategies and adaptations within general and/or special education programs** in order to benefit from Reading First, IEL, and/or IDEAL instruction and demonstrate progress in reading proficiency. Such strategies or adaptations may include, but not be limited to: adaptations to teaching strategies, classroom organization, instructional group size, frequency of small group instruction, instructional materials, equipment, modes of student responding or positive behavioral supports—provided by a general education teacher, special education teacher or trained paraeducator under the guidance of a certified teacher.

Organization of Instruction

- Instruction for students with disabilities should address all elements of literacy learning including: motivation and background knowledge, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency and writing.
- No single reading approach or set of reading materials will be effective for all students with disabilities. Therefore, while students with disabilities should have access to the district's CRP, materials and assessments within general and/or special education classes, differentiated and/or specialized materials, strategies and techniques appropriate to their functioning level and instructional needs should be used, when required.
- Based on an individual student's learning needs and responsiveness to instruction, the provision of scientifically based practices for students with disabilities may require instruction and practice that is **more frequent, intense, explicit, direct and structured than that provided for in typical lessons.**

Organization of Instruction (continued)

- If students with disabilities are delayed in making progress in one or more aspects of reading (e.g. phonics, fluency, reading comprehension), students should receive remediation in these areas of difficulty. At the same time, progressive instruction in other aspects of reading (e.g. vocabulary, listening comprehension) should continue, so that students will not be delayed in all areas.
- While instruction for students with disabilities may sometimes focus on a specific reading skill or strategy in isolation an essential part of the lesson should include teaching that skill or strategy in context in order for students to make connections to real reading. It is not sufficient for students with disabilities to receive instruction in isolated skills and expect that they will understand how those skills relate to reading.
- When determining class composition, the range of reading abilities and number of small instructional groupings required per classroom should be considered. There should be sufficient time for teachers to conduct intensive, direct reading instruction on a daily basis for struggling students who are reading below grade level either through small flexible groups or through individual instructional formats. Whole group instruction should also be provided, at times, to address common instructional needs identified through classroom based assessment. However, whole group instruction should not be the predominant instructional format.
- In addition to systematic, explicit, direct instruction in reading, students with disabilities, like all other students, require frequent opportunity and support to engage in independent reading with texts they can read and enjoy to promote fluency and comprehension.
- Because student writing enhances reading, students with disabilities, regardless of program or placement should be instructed in the writing process and should be provided with frequent opportunities to express their thoughts in writing across the curriculum.
- Because students with disabilities require integrated instruction for learning, it is important to use authentic writing as a vehicle to help students understand the connection between phonics and spelling.
- For students with disabilities who are not responsive to intensive instruction in Reading First, IEL, or IDEAL programs, even with the use of adaptations, consideration should be made to provide additional and/or alternative reading instruction. Instructional programs should also provide for an individual student's "other educational needs" resulting from his or her disability that influence the acquisition of reading proficiency, i.e., cognitive, language, emotional, social, sensory and health factors. Students with disabilities may require additional or alternative specialized instructional and assessment methods, strategies and materials responsive to individual needs and learning styles (e.g. multi-sensory structured language methods, sight based reading approaches; visual-auditory-kinesthetic approaches; computer assisted instruction; structured letter clustering methods, and Reading Recovery techniques such as text-leveling, reviewing familiar text, previewing new text, word analysis and comprehension strategies).

Access to Materials and Equipment

- Teachers of students with disabilities must have access to all CRP manuals and instructional materials used in general education classrooms for Reading First and IEL programs in addition to specialized supplementary materials and supplies.
- A range of grade level CRP materials that correspond to the varying reading levels of students with disabilities within each class should be provided.
- Classrooms must have libraries that contain reading materials of varying genres on a variety of reading levels that are commensurate with students' independent as well as instructional levels. Because there is variation in reading levels and cognitive abilities of students with disabilities at each grade level, it is recommended that programs and classes serving students with disabilities contain more than the Reading First and Abbott regulation requirements of 300 titles per class for K-3 programs.
- Students with disabilities must have access to good literature used by proficient readers even if these materials are above their instructional reading levels. Teachers should read these materials aloud to their students or these materials may be available on tape for students to use independently.
- For emergent readers, sufficient copies of predictable books, books with controlled vocabulary, and decodable books in a range of reading levels must be available for small group guided reading activities, shared or independent reading.
- Computers and a variety of reading/authoring software must be available to enable students with disabilities to use technology for learning.

Access to Professional Development for Special Education Teachers

In order for students with disabilities to have access to Reading First, special education teachers must have access to the full range of Reading First, IEL and IDEAL Initiatives' professional development activities and materials:

- Special education teachers must be included in district training on Reading First, IEL and the IDEAL Initiatives. If higher education training/classes are provided to district staff, special education teachers must have access to these classes.
- Special education teachers must be involved in support activities provided by the Reading Coordinator and Reading Coaches.
- Opportunities to analyze and discuss instructional implications of assessment results for students with disabilities, including summative, ongoing, and diagnostic assessment should be provided to special education teachers.

Beginning Reading and Writing, Strickland, D.S. and Morrow, L.M. (Eds.) Teachers College Press, 2000.

Best Practice in Literacy Instruction, Gambrell, L.B., Morrow, L.M., Neuman, S.B. & Pressley, M. (Eds.) Guilford Press, 1999.

New Jersey Language Arts Literacy Curriculum Framework (Chapter 7-Adaptations for Students,) New Jersey Department of Education, Fall, 1998.

New Jersey Reading First Program, Librera et al, New Jersey Department of Education, September 2001.

Supporting Struggling Readers and Writers: Strategies for Classroom Intervention Grades 3-6, Strickland, D.S., Ganske, K., and Monroe, J.K., 2002.

What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-Based Programs, Allington, R.L., Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 2001.

What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction, Farstrup, A.E. & Samuels, S.J. (Eds), International Reading Association, 2002.

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Supporting Research on literacy and students classified with disabilities

Carlberg, C. & Kavale, K. (1980). The efficacy of special versus regular class placement for exceptional children: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Special Education* 14(3), 295-309.

The results of existing research when integrated statistically demonstrated that special class placement is an inferior alternative to regular class placement in benefiting children removed from the educational mainstream. (304)

Elbaum, B.E., Vaughn, S., Hughes, M.T. (1999). Grouping practices and reading outcomes for students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children* 65(3), 399-415.

Results indicated positive effects for alternative grouping formats compared to whole-class instruction.

...small group learning is associated with higher academic achievement than whole class instruction without grouping.

In the majority of the studies included in the meta-analyses, students with disabilities who received reading instruction in one of these alternative grouping formats (i.e., pairing, small groups, multiple grouping formats) were compared to

students with disabilities who received instruction delivered to the whole class...reading outcomes measures for students taught in these grouping formats were, on average, nearly half a standard deviation higher than those of comparison students.

Rea, P. J. McLaughlin, V. L., & Walther-Thomas, C. (2002). Outcomes for students with learning disabilities in inclusive and pullout programs. *Exceptional Children* 68(2), 203-223.

Students served in inclusive classrooms earned higher grades, achieved higher or comparable scores on standardized tests, committed no more behavioral infractions, and attended more days of school than students served in pullout program. (203)

Results suggest that with adequate adaptations, individualized programs, and sufficient support, students with disabilities can achieve academic and social success in general education classrooms. Principals and teacher leaders need to work together to develop professional teaching and planning schedules that enable classroom teachers and specialists...to work together on an ongoing basis... Results from this study also suggest collaborative structures, such as co-teaching and weekly team meetings, facilitated shared responsibility for student performance. (220)

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (1998). Preventing reading difficulties in young children. Washington DC: National Academy Press.

...the generally accepted estimate that reading disability accounts for about 80 percent of all learning disabilities indicates that 3.54 percent of all schoolchildren in the United States (or 2,046,254 children) are ostensibly receiving services for a reading disability (Lerner, 1989). (89)

Schools need to ensure that all the specialists engaged in child study or individualized program (IEP) meetings for special education placement, early childhood intervention, out-of-classroom interventions, or in-classroom support are well informed about research in reading development and the prevention of reading difficulties. (333)

Torgesen, J.K. (2002). Lessons learned from intervention research in reading: A way to go before we rest. *Learning and Teaching Reading*, 89-103.

...the most that can be said of typical special education programmes for children with severe reading disabilities is that they tend to *stabilize* the relative deficit in reading skill rather than *remediate* it. That is, children do not fall farther behind in their reading skills once they are placed in special education, but neither do they 'close the gap' in reading ability with their age-level peers.

Torgesen, J.K. (2004). Preventative and remedial interventions for children with reading difficulties: Lessons from research. CORE Literacy Leadership Summit Presentation

“Sustained, intensive, scientifically based reading program(s) emphasizing the critical elements of reading for students with reading difficulties/disabilities” should consist of “homogenous small group instruction (1:1-1:3)” for a “minimum of two 30-minute sessions per day...in addition to 90 minutes of core reading instruction.”

Vaughn, S., Moody, S.W., & Schumm, J.S. (1998). Broken promises: Reading instruction in the resource room. *Exceptional Children* 64, pp. 211-225.

Results indicated that (Special Education) teachers primarily provided whole group instruction to relatively large groups of students, and little differentiated instruction or materials were provided despite the wide range of reading abilities represented...and little instruction that addressed word recognition or comprehension was observed.

Research has shown that students in pull-out reading programs (e.g., Title I and special education) often receive disjointed, inconsistent reading programs that are often not aligned with the reading program of the general education classroom.

Guidelines under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) specify the development and implementation of an instructional program designed to meet the individual needs of students.

Most of the students with learning disabilities who participated in the resource room reading program did not receive an individualized reading program nor were they provided reading material that corresponded with their instructional reading level.