

Challenges and Opportunities for Administrators and Leadership Teams: Rating the Issues that Impact Reading Recovery

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During the 2007 North American Leadership Academy/Teacher Leader Institute sponsored by RRCNA, we invited participants to share the issues they face in the implementation of Reading Recovery. We provided a list of 20 possible issues and invited the addition of any not listed. Participants worked in small groups at round tables to select the top five challenges that they face in their sites/districts and to rank order those selected issues.

Responses clustered around four general categories. Summaries of comments are provided below, followed by our suggestions for future opportunities. Consider the opportunities a starting place and make commitments to future actions for your local context.

A worksheet is provided at the end of this document to encourage team problem solving in your district or school. For each issue described below, the team can use the worksheet to record the current status, the desired status, and steps/actions needed to achieve those group goals.

1. FUNDING AND COVERAGE

The issue ranked as the highest priority by most of the respondents was the challenge of providing adequate and diversified funding for Reading Recovery. Participants provided a range of reasons for this challenge: the effect of the current economy on education; annual changes in funding levels in Title I; reduced federal funds; Reading First; too many programs competing for the same dollars; lack of understanding about sources of funding; administrative changes; at-risk students not a priority; and the misunderstanding that Reading Recovery seems too expensive.

Connected to concerns about funding and tight budgets were concerns about expanding coverage to serve all children who need Reading Recovery. Many respondents indicated that most of the service was limited to available Title I funding. Other issues included the need to help others understand the need for increased funding; differing/competing philosophies; and issues related to distance in rural communities.

Opportunities: It may be helpful to look at *why* funding is an issue. Is it because of differing philosophies, competing priorities, decreasing amounts of federal funds available from the state, or lack of knowledge about the powerful, cost-effective results of Reading Recovery? Or is it because of some other local issues that need to be identified? Knowing *why* funding is an issue will make a difference in *how* you address the issue.

Discussion about programs and their research-based effectiveness may shift more funding to Reading Recovery. You may need to work with your state department to ensure inclusion of Reading Recovery in Reading First funding, Title funding sources, and response to intervention funding under IDEA legislation (see www.readingrecovery.org for “Facts and Positions” to support your efforts).

Share information about the costs and benefits of Reading Recovery (see www.readingrecovery.org). Relate this issue with #3 below and work as a team to develop a comprehensive plan for literacy learning for all children, with Reading Recovery as the essential first-grade safety net.

Sample questions to ask as you problem solve the issue of funding and coverage:

- Why is funding an issue? Identify the possible reasons.
- Is your funding source diverse so as to make your site less dependent upon a single funding stream that might “go away” at some point due to changing federal priorities, changes in statewide funding priorities, etc.? If not, how might you make connections with others in your site to initiate discussion about other potential sources for funding? Example: Assemble a diverse team of participants from departments such as curriculum, federal programs, special education, bilingual/ESL, finance, etc. to talk about the results and cost benefits of Reading Recovery, as well as the need for multiple sources of funding. Identify other funding possibilities.
- Is your coverage at a level that maximizes results? If not, how can you expand coverage? Example: Develop a long-range implementation plan that over 3-5 years will move you toward full coverage.

2. ADVOCACY

Many respondents focused on the need to respond to inaccurate or misleading information about Reading Recovery. They expressed the need to get out the positive data about Reading Recovery. Interfering philosophies and uninformed critics often present negative perspectives about Reading Recovery. Rather than a defensive stand, respondents want positive information in the forefront – such as the report on Reading Recovery’s effectiveness from the What Works Clearinghouse and the rationales for including Reading Recovery as a response to intervention.

Concerns about keeping Reading Recovery visible and dynamic were expressed. Some respondents said that Reading Recovery is now taken for granted – or forgotten. It is not on the ‘hot’ list and people lose perspective of its contributions in schools. Others said it is only visible when in jeopardy. The reaction of federal officials to Reading Recovery

has been harmful and misinformation about its effectiveness and cost has been used to discourage adoption. The complexity of the intervention and its network of support often makes it difficult for decision makers to get all the facts.

Respondents expressed a need to provide rationales for including Reading Recovery as an early intervention to local, state, and federal policymakers/decision makers.

Opportunities: It is a great time for all of us to advocate for Reading Recovery. The good news from the What Works Clearinghouse has validated Reading Recovery's scientific research base (see www.readingrecovery.org). Make this compelling news visible to all decision makers, dispelling misinformation about Reading Recovery outcomes. And work to make Reading Recovery an important part of the response to intervention (RTI) under the IDEA legislation (see www.readingrecovery.org).

Determine other positive actions that would be important in your school or system (e.g., performance of former Reading Recovery children on state assessment measures). Decide what matters to your decision makers and tie Reading Recovery to those priorities.

Sample questions to ask as you problem solve the area of advocacy:

- Do you have advocates for Reading Recovery throughout the system? If not, how can you expand advocacy? Example: Form a Reading Recovery Advisory Board composed of school board members, top leadership in the central office, Reading Recovery personnel, classroom teachers, parents, etc. Set advocacy for Reading Recovery as one of the goals of the group.
- Are parents strong advocates for your program? If not, how might you capture their positive comments as part of an overall advocacy plan? Example: Keep an "autograph" book for parents to make their comments when they are there with their child in a behind-the-glass session. Share their comments at advisory board meetings, with administrators who visit the site, etc.
- Have you advocated for Reading Recovery as a response to intervention (RTI) to reduce the number of children referred and placed in special education?
- What are the best ways to communicate the success of Reading Recovery as a scientifically based intervention to key decision makers in your district? Who are the stakeholders? What information do they need/want? How will you get information about Reading Recovery to them?

3. READING RECOVERY WITHIN A COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY PLAN

Many respondents commented on the lack of understanding that Reading Recovery is an important safety net within a comprehensive literacy plan – not a 'stand-alone'

intervention. They considered the following issues to be crucial in institutionalizing Reading Recovery: understandings and ownership of stakeholders; communication among stakeholders; a shared vision that all children can learn; ongoing professional development for teachers of high-risk children and for all school personnel; and the need for accepting responsibility and advocating for children throughout the grades. Respondents expressed the need for institutionalizing Reading Recovery as a response to intervention under the IDEA legislation.

Challenges to the goal of institutionalizing Reading Recovery were cited: the lack of understanding of the role of Reading Recovery in comprehensive literacy planning; conflict resulting from different ideological perspectives; the need for a formal and visible plan; changes in administration; and funding cuts for interventions.

Opportunities: Opportunities in this area are directly tied to those in #1 above. Consider ways to develop or revisit your literacy plan for schools and the district. Consider ways to build understandings and ownership of the plan and of Reading Recovery's role within that plan. Useful publications available from the Reading Recovery Council of North America include *A Principal's Guide to Reading Recovery* and *A Site Coordinator's Guide to the Effective Implementation of Reading Recovery*.

Sample questions to ask as you problem solve the issue of Reading Recovery within a comprehensive literacy plan:

- Does your site have a comprehensive literacy plan that includes Reading Recovery as the first net intervention? If not, how can you begin development of such a plan? Example: Bring a broad-based team together to discuss the possibility of creating a plan. Include influential persons throughout the system. Have the group discuss why such a plan would prove beneficial to the overall literacy program in the district. (Note: Refer to Appendix A in *A Site Coordinator's Guide to the Effective Implementation of Reading Recovery*.)
- Does your site have a plan for RTI? Can you include Reading Recovery as RTI to reduce the number of children referred and placed in special education? Example: Collaborate with the person in your district who is responsible for RTI. Provide this person with information regarding Reading Recovery and how it is an excellent match for the RTI concept.

4. READING RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION

A final category of responses related to decisions made about Reading Recovery within schools and systems. A summary of challenges in order of respondent priority follows:

- ***Protecting time of Reading Recovery teachers and teacher leaders:*** Reading Recovery teachers and teacher leaders are often pulled for other duties;

frequently teacher leaders are ‘spread too thin’; often there is a lack of understanding of importance of teachers’ daily lessons.

- **Monitoring former Reading Recovery children:** “Time” was cited as a major factor in monitoring and advocating for former Reading Recovery students. A plan for monitoring should not be left to chance, but arranged at the time of exit from Reading Recovery.
- **Selecting and training high-quality Reading Recovery teacher leader(s) and teachers:** A variety of issues were cited as challenges: younger teachers with lack of experience; principals selecting teachers to solve classroom problems; union issues.
- **Selecting staffing models:** Some challenging issues were cited such as planning time, effective pairing or sharing of responsibilities, and lack of flexibility due to funding limitations.
- **Providing for ongoing evaluation and revision of the implementation plan:** Comments included the need to improve results based on evaluation data and the need for ‘vintage’ sites to change their plans as the system ‘ages.’

Opportunities: Stakeholders can take the opportunity to set priorities for evaluating Reading Recovery implementation and setting priorities for improvement. Issues will vary across settings, but some issues to consider include the following:

- level of coverage
- commitment to daily lessons
- ongoing monitoring/mentoring of former Reading Recovery children
- selection and support of highly qualified teachers
- use of data to improve the implementation
- ongoing evaluation and revision of the implementation plan

Sample questions to ask as you problem solve the issue of institutionalizing Reading Recovery within a comprehensive literacy plan:

- Does the site coordinator meet regularly with teacher leaders and principals to discuss issues of implementation?
- Does the teacher leader meet with principals to discuss school data, commitment to daily lessons, monitoring of children, etc.?
- Do schools have school literacy teams to work together to solve problems and improve implementation at the school level? Do these teams assume responsibility for monitoring ongoing progress of former Reading Recovery children and serving as their advocates as they move up the grades?
- Is there an implementation plan? Is it current? (Note: See pages 16-18 in the Site Coordinators Guide for information about implementation plans.)

A Challenge!

Every intervention in schools faces challenges or obstacles. Because Reading Recovery makes a difference in the literacy success of children, in the professional learning of teachers, and in the systematic implementation and coordination of literacy planning, we must face all challenges with positive and visible evidence. The evidence is available – it is our responsibility to share it and be vigilant in our efforts to keep and expand Reading Recovery in our schools.

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM PLANNING SHEET

AREA	WHERE WE ARE	WHERE WE WANT TO BE	NEXT STEPS
FUNDING			
COVERAGE			
ADVOCACY			
COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY PLAN			
OTHER IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES			