
Research in Brief:
Effective Reading Programs for Struggling Students in the Elementary Grades



Reading is an important skill that children must develop, and it is linked to future academic success. Schools invest a substantial amount of time and energy in teaching children to read and in remedial programs for students who struggle with reading. Much basic research exists on the skills necessary for reading and the deficits that lead to reading difficulties, but there is less research on specific programs used by schools and teachers. There are many classroom programs and approaches designed to help struggling young students improve their reading skills.

What types of remedial reading programs are most effective for students from kindergarten to grade 5?

A recent systematic review examined studies of remedial reading programs and compared them to one another. The reviewers examined the following types of programs:

- One-to-one tutoring by teachers – includes Reading Recovery and other tutoring models
- One-to-one tutoring by paraprofessionals and volunteers
- Small-group tutorials
- Instructional technology – approaches using computer-assisted instruction
- Classroom instructional process approaches – approaches that focus on training teachers in effective classroom methods, such as PALS, CIRC, Direct Instruction
- Classroom instructional process with tutoring – approaches that train teachers in specific instruction strategies as well as providing individual tutoring for struggling students (Success for All program)

Researchers found that the most effective strategy for remedial readers was an initial focus on improving classroom instruction methods, followed by one-on-one tutoring with an emphasis on phonics for students who continued to struggle.

Why does this matter?

- ⇒ *Reading is an important skill that is linked to future academic success.*
- ⇒ *It is important to provide remedial intervention for students who have difficulty reading.*
- ⇒ *Classroom instructional process approaches and one-on-one tutoring with an emphasis on phonics are the most effective strategies for helping struggling readers.*



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What is a systematic review?

The purpose of a systematic review is to sum up the best available research on a specific question. This is done by bringing together the results of several studies. Studies included in a review are screened for quality, so that the findings of a large number of studies can be combined.

What did they do?

The researchers conducted a literature search using JSTOR, ERIC, EBSCO, PsycINFO, and Dissertation Abstracts databases to find relevant studies.

The following criteria qualified a study for inclusion in the review:

- Reading programs were for students in grades K-5
- Programs were aimed at struggling students, who were eligible due to any of the following:
 - Having reading disabilities
 - Being in the lowest 1/3 of their classes
 - Receiving tutoring or other intensive services to remediate serious learning problems
- Programs were at least 12 weeks duration
- Studies used random assignment
- Studies compared programs to control groups

97 studies of remedial reading programs were included in the review.



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What did they learn?

The researchers found that one-to-one tutoring was an effective strategy for remediating struggling students. Tutoring by teachers and paraprofessionals/volunteers both had significant positive effects on reading outcomes, however, teacher-led programs were generally found to be more effective.

Tutoring programs that emphasized phonics were associated with strong outcomes. Tutoring interventions provided in first grade did not have a continued effect in the higher elementary grades unless the interventions were continued.

Small group tutorials were found to be effective, however not as effective as individual tutoring.

It was also found that instructional process approaches, particularly cooperative learning and structured phonetic models, were highly effective both for low-achieving students and other students. Finally, computer instruction programs were found to have little impact on reading.

This brief summary was prepared from:

Slavin, R. E., Lake, C., Davis, S., & Madden, N. A. (2011). Effective programs for struggling readers: A best-evidence synthesis. *Educational Research Review*, 6, 1-26.

Please see the original document for full details. In the case of any disagreement between this summary and the original document, the original document should be seen as authoritative.

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Individual Tutoring – Teacher-Led	
Reading Recovery Auditory Discrimination in Depth Early Steps/Howard Street Tutoring	Reading Rescue Targeted Reading Intervention
Individual Tutoring – Paraprofessional/Volunteer-Led	
Sound Partners SMART Reading Rescue	Howard Street Tutoring Book Buddies
Small Group Tutorials	
Corrective Reading QuickReads Targeted Intervention Proactive Reading Responsive Reading Read Naturally	Voyager Passport Empower Reading SHIP Early Intervention in Reading Read, Write and Type LiPS
Classroom Instructional Process	
CIRC PALS Direct Instruction	Project Read RAILS Precision Teaching
Classroom Instructional Process with Tutoring	
Success for All	