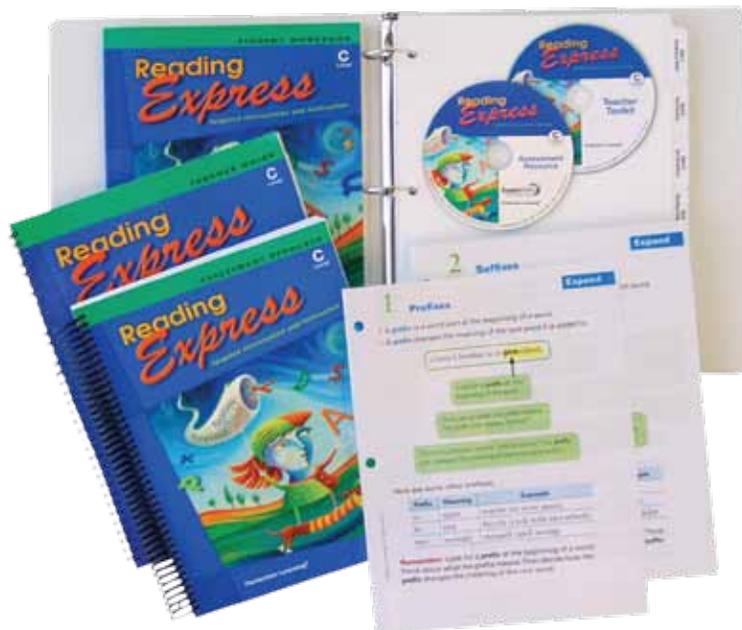# Response to Intervention (RtI) and Reading Instruction: Effectively Using Reading Express to Boost Student Literacy Skills

"Response to Intervention (RtI) is a comprehensive early detection and prevention strategy that identifies struggling students and assists them before they fall behind."

—National Center for Education Evaluation (IES), 2008

"Low-performing students need assistance to focus on and internalize the skills and strategies they are taught."

—McCormack, 2003; Strickland, 2002

"The most effective approach to improving reading comprehension in students with learning disabilities appears to be a combination of direct instruction and strategy instruction."

—Stanberry & Swanson, 2003

The term RtI, or Response to Intervention, first came into vogue in K–12 public education after the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004. As part of our federal education law, RtI was identified as a specific approach school districts could take to adjust classroom instruction, offer specific interventions, and boost overall student achievement, particularly among students designated under IDEA as needing additional assistance.

Based on more than a century of psychological and education research, in RtI the classroom teacher "modifies instruction (intervention) to help a struggling child, and then checks the child's progress regularly (called progress monitoring) to see if the intervention is working."[1] If the intervention works, the problem is solved. If it does not work, the teacher must change the intervention and continue to monitor student progress. If the student still does not improve, the teacher must apply more intensive and specific interventions to address student learning deficiencies.

[1]Hale, J.B. (2008). *Response to Intervention: Guidelines for Parents and Practitioners*. Wrights Law.
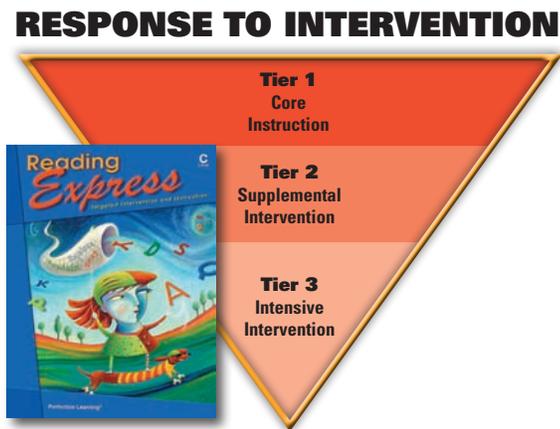
RtI is a powerful tool to help teachers equip students with reading proficiency they need to perform at grade level while avoiding tagging students with a specific learning disability, or SLD, label. It recognizes that the vast majority of students (some estimate upwards of 95 percent) are capable of performing at proficient academic levels, thus allowing IDEA programs to specifically target the 5 to 10 percent of the student population that are truly designated with an SLD.

Through RtI, schools are building literacy skills among students while providing teachers the instructional knowledge, materials, and support necessary to boost student achievement. In recent years, school districts have also successfully utilized RtI efforts to address the specific reading skill acquisition needs of struggling learners, including English Language Learners (ELLs).

RtI and Vocabulary and Literacy Skills Instruction

"Tier 2 instruction should take place in small homogeneous groups…using curricula that address the major components of reading instruction."

—*National Center for Education Evaluation, 2008*

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Tier 1
Core
Instruction

Tier 2
Supplemental
Intervention

Tier 3
Intensive
Intervention

According to the Institute of Education Sciences' 2008 Practice Guide on Response to Intervention (RtI)[2], RtI is typically thought of having three tiers, or levels, of intervention. These tiers include:
- **Tier 1—**Instruction provided to all students in a class.
- **Tier 2—**Interventions provided only to students who demonstrate problems based on screening measures or weak progress from regular classroom instruction.
- **Tier 3—**Interventions provided to students who do not progress after a reasonable amount of time with the Tier 2 intervention and require more intensive assistance.

Further, the Institute of Education Sciences identified five key recommendations school districts and educators should consider when adopting and implementing an RtI solution to improve student reading proficiency:
- Screen all students for potential reading problems at the beginning of the year and again in the middle of the year. Regularly monitor the progress of students who are at elevated risk for developing reading disabilities.
- Provide differentiated reading instruction for all students based on assessments of students' current reading levels (Tier 1).
- Provide intensive, systematic instruction on up to three foundational reading skills in small groups to students who score below the benchmark on universal screening. Typically these groups meet between three and five times a week for 20 to 40 minutes (Tier 2).
- Monitor the progress of Tier 2 students at least once a month. Use this data to determine whether students still require intervention. For those still making insufficient progress, school-wide teams should design a Tier 3 intervention plan.
- Provide intensive instruction daily that promotes the development of various components of reading proficiency to students who show minimal progress after reasonable time in Tier 2 small group instruction (Tier 3).

These recommendations build on a rich body of research on literacy instruction for struggling readers, including Pearson and Gallagher's instructional model used in the Gradual Release of Responsibility. This model begins with direct instruction and is followed by the gradual release of responsibility from teacher direction to student applications, using the following design:
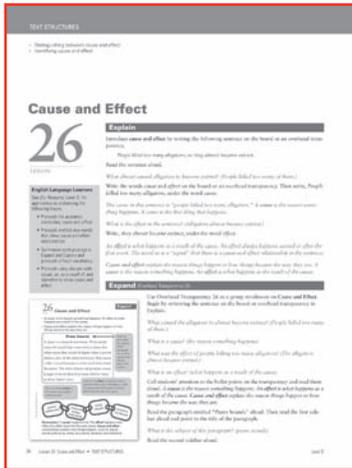- Teacher modeling
- Guided practice
- Independent practice
- Application

This research model is reflected in a number of evidence-based literacy RtI instructional models, most notably *Reading Express: Targeted Intervention and Instruction. Reading Express* first directly and explicitly teaches reading skills and strategies to one child or an entire classroom. Effectively utilizing the Direct Instruction (DI) model, *Reading Express'* approach is especially effective with small groups of students who are struggling with comprehension skills.

By then layering the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model onto the DI approach, *Reading Express* teachers are empowered to move from teacher-directed instruction and guided practice on an explicit skill or strategy to independent practice and application by the student. The results speak for themselves. *Reading Express* students acquire the vocabulary and literacy skills necessary to reach desired proficiency levels.

[2]Gersten, R., Compton, D., Connor, C.M., Dimino, J., Santoro, L., Linan-Thompson, S. & Tilly, W.D. (2008). Assisting students struggling with reading: *Response to Intervention and multi-tier intervention for reading in the primary grades. A practice guide.* (NCEE 2009-4045). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Research-Based Interventions to Boost Literacy Skills

Sample page from the
Reading Express
Teacher Guide, Level D

"Low-achieving students benefit from scaffolded instruction, with the teacher modeling strategies and guiding practice."

—Lauer 2004; Strickland, 2002

"With independent application, struggling readers develop the confidence to become self-directed learners."

—Strickland, 2002

Decades of research on effective reading instruction, particularly with struggling readers, has clearly identified best practice in instructional frameworks and design. The National Academy of Sciences, the National Reading Panel, the Alliance for Excellent Education, and the U.S. Department of Education have all focused on the core components that go into effective literacy instruction. Focusing on the five research-identified core reading skills, educators—particularly those leading classrooms in grades three through eight—can boost student reading proficiency through:

1) Directed questioning and responses
2) Teacher modeling of skill and strategy
3) Guided practice
4) Skill practice and repetition with control of task difficulty (independent practice)
5) Formative assessment and student reflection
6) Additional guided practice
7) Independent application

These seven steps are particularly important in RtI efforts, equipping educators with a clear blueprint for addressing the Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 levels of intervention. That is why programs such as *Reading Express* have successfully adopted these steps—along with decades of formative research—to build a comprehensive instructional model that addresses the evolving needs of the 21st century classroom.

Reading Express begins with scripted lessons that provide an introduction to the standards-based skill. It then moves into minilessons that explain each standards-based skill in the program. That is followed with lessons that provide scaffolded student practice for each standards-based skill, first through teacher-guided activity and then through independent student practice. Students are regularly assessed throughout the process, gaining additional practice in areas of need. The *Reading Express* program then has students apply the newly-acquired literacy skill in a content-area activity, using reading ability to enhance science, social studies, health, music, or any other subject where the targeted skill is a natural fit.

Applying Reading Acquisition Skills to ELL Students
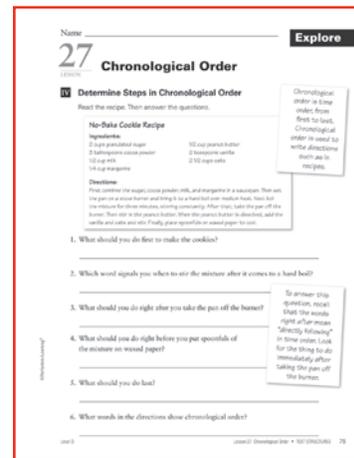
Sample page from the
Reading Express, Level D

"Children cannot learn the language they need for academic development on their own. All students need instructional support but especially English Learners."

—Lily Wong Fillmore, 2004

"If English language learners are to catch up academically with their native English-speaking peers, their cognitive growth and mastery of academic content must continue while English is being learned. Thus, the teaching of English as a second language should be integrated with the teaching of other academic content that is appropriate to the students' cognitive level."

—Cummings, 1994

Literacy RtI solutions are particularly important when addressing the growing English Language Learner (ELL) population. As illustrated by the rich and deep body of literacy instruction research collected over the past four decades, we know that the challenges of teaching reading skills to ELLs are similar to those facing the struggling learners at large. Focusing on the acquisition of core literacy skills, ELLs must: 1) develop a clear understanding of the topic or main idea; 2) acquire the vocabulary used in instruction; 3) use more language in the learning process; and 4) successfully complete classroom assignments.

Federal law—including Title I, Title II, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act—seek to ensure that English Language Learners keep pace, linguistically and academically, with their native English-speaking peers. In order to meet these challenging expectations, teachers must integrate English language instruction with the teaching of essential content-area concepts.

Ultimately, instructional success comes at the classroom level, from teachers who are knowledgeable and skilled in understanding various instructional approaches, who effectively apply them in the classroom, and who provide the interventions necessary to ensure all students are gaining the reading abilities expected for their grade level.

Reading Express offers ELL resources specifically designed to work with each standards-based lesson. These resources include skill-specific lessons and reproducibles to frontload vocabulary and build background knowledge for English Language Learners.

Successful students learn new information by connecting it to what they already know to construct meaning. This prior knowledge is called schemata and reflects the experiences, conceptual understanding, attitudes, values, and skills a reader brings to a text situation. The frontloading activities found in *Reading Express*' ELL resources build on a schemata as they draw parallels between English Language Learners' native language and the academic and content vocabulary in the standards-based lessons in *Reading Express.*

Conclusion

If we are to move students in grades three through eight to reading proficiency, schools must effectively use Response to Intervention programs to assess student learning deficiencies, apply specific learning interventions, and provide ongoing student assessment and progress monitoring. That means providing both the differentiated instructional strategies that are proven most effective with struggling learners.

The existing body of academic research clearly demonstrates the impact RtI solutions such as *Reading Express* can have on struggling readers—including ELLs—offering proven-effective strategic (Tier 2) and intensive (Tier 3) interventions to move students to proficient standards. *Reading Express* provides educators in grades three through eight the supplementary program they need to boost student literacy levels and apply those newly acquired skills to other academic subjects. Aligned with federal and state standards, *Reading Express* provides schools a needed RtI tool to address comprehensive student achievement and improvement.
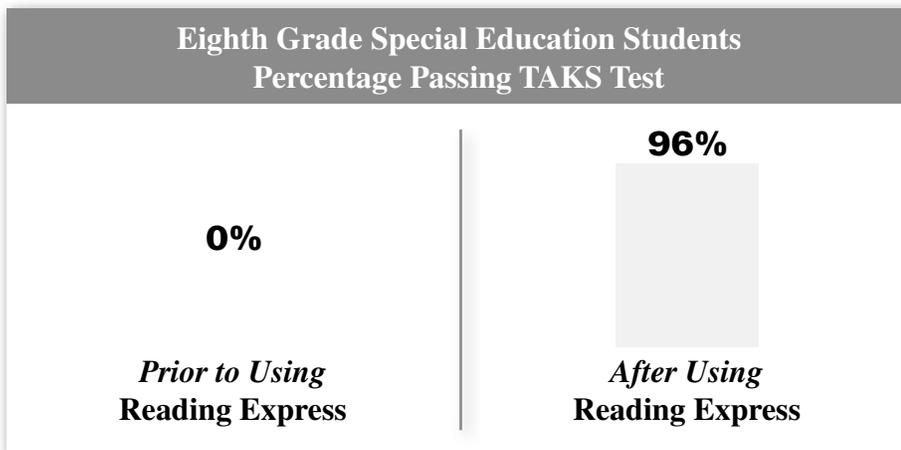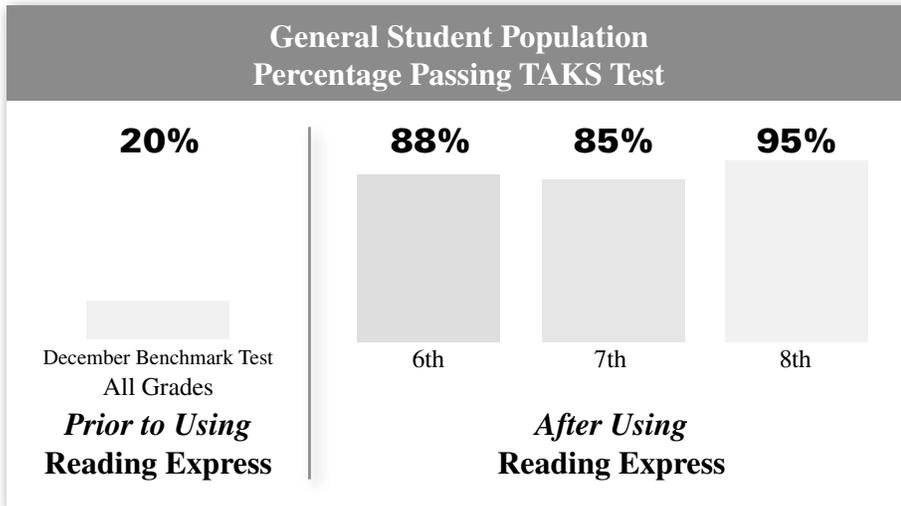
References and Resources

Beck, Isabel, McKeown, M. & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction.* New York: Guilford Press.

Cummings, J. (1994). *Knowledge, power and identity in teaching ESL.* In F. Genesee (ed.) *Educating second language children: The whole child, the whole curriculum, the whole community.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Denton, C.A., Vaughn, S. & Fletcher, Jack M. *Bringing Research-Based Practice in Reading Intervention to Scale. Abstract. Learning Disabilities Research & Practice on the Web,* June 13, 2003, http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/118888229/abstract?CRETRY = 1&SRETRY = 0.

Division for Learning Disabilities. (2007). *Thinking about response to intervention and learning disabilities: A teacher's guide.* Arlington, VA: Author.

Gersten, R., Compton, D., Connor, C.M., Dimino, J., Santoro, L., Linan-Thompson, S. & Tilly, W.D. (2008). *Assisting students struggling with reading: Response to Intervention and multi-tier intervention for reading in the primary grades. A practice guide.* (NCEE 2009-4045). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. Pub. L. No. 108-446 (2004).

Lauer, P.A., Akiba, M., Wilkerson, S.B., Apthorp, H.S., Snow, D. & Martin-Glenn, M. (2004). *The effectiveness of out-of-school-time strategies in assisting low-achieving students in reading and mathematics: A research synthesis.* Aurora, CO: Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning.

Marzano, Robert. (2004). *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

McCormack, R.L. & Paratore, J.R. (eds.) (2003). *After Early Intervention, Then What? Teaching Struggling Readers in Grades 3 and Beyond.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction.* (National Institute of Health Pub. No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Pearson, P.D. & Gallagher, M.C. (1983). *The instruction of reading comprehension.* Contemporary Educational Psychology. 8, 317-344.

President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education. (2002). *A new era: Revitalizing special education for children and their families.* Washington, DC: Author.

Stanbury, Kristin & Swanson, H. Lee, Ph.D. (2003) *What the Science Says: Effective Reading Interventions for Kids with Learning Disabilities on the Web,* www.greatschools.net, http://www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/showarticle/2745.

Strickland, D.S., Ganske, K. & Monroe, J.K. (2002). *Struggling Readers and Writers: Strategies for Classroom Intervention 3-6.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse: and Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Swanson, H.L., Hoskyn, M. & Lee, C. (1999). *Interventions for students with learning disabilities: A meta-analysis of treatment outcomes.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Vacea, R.T. (2002). *"Making a Difference in Adolescents' School Lives: Visible and Invisible Aspects of Content Area Reading."* In A.E. Farstrup & S.J. Samuels (eds.) *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction* (3rd ed., pp. 184-204). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Wong Fillmore, Lily (2004). *The role of language in academic development.* Santa Rosa, CA: Sonoma County Office of Education.
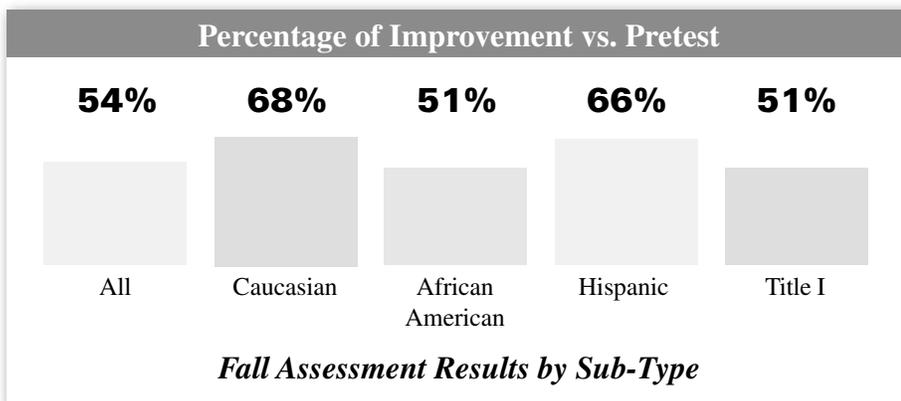
Reading Express
Targeted Intervention and Instruction

South Middle School
Edinburg, Texas

General Student Population
Percentage Passing TAKS Test

20%	**88%**	**85%**	**95%**

December Benchmark Test
All Grades

6th   7th   8th

Prior to Using **Reading Express**

After Using **Reading Express**

Eighth Grade Special Education Students
Percentage Passing TAKS Test

0%

96%

Prior to Using **Reading Express**

After Using **Reading Express**

Palm Beach, Florida

Reading Express pilot project implemented
in two middle schools in the district.

Percentage of Improvement vs. Pretest

54%	**68%**	**51%**	**66%**	**51%**
All	Caucasian	African American	Hispanic	Title I

Fall Assessment Results by Sub-Type

"The special education students who were targeted to use the *Reading Express* material had not ever passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAKS). Of the 25 special education students who used *Reading Express* in 8th grade, only 1 student did not pass the test. This student was only 4 questions away from passing."

—Instructional Lead Teacher
Edinburg, Texas

"*Reading Express* has become one of the most useful resources that our school has provided. It has enabled us as teachers to hone in on skills that our students struggle with… With these tools our teaching skills grow as well as improve. If our skills improve then our students' skills improve. Therefore, *Reading Express* has become somewhat of a savior for our students."

—Sixth Grade ELA Teacher
Edinburg, Texas

"The skills covered are comprehensive and at a good instructional level for Level 1 and 2 students. Given the scope of a full year, I am certain it would be a valuable tool in our classrooms for continued improvement and ongoing skill development."

—Sixth Grade Reading Teacher
Wellington Landings Middle School