

Reading Recovery in Georgia, 1991-1995 *Four-Year Report*

Research Results

The success of Reading Recovery has been carefully documented since its inception in New Zealand. Pilot studies there and in the United States demonstrated that the program empowers children in the lowest 20 percent of their class with the strategies necessary to read at or above grade level in an average of 12-16 weeks. Follow-up studies in both countries show that Reading Recovery children continue to read and write at an average level or better after receiving the intervention, reducing the need for long-term remediation.

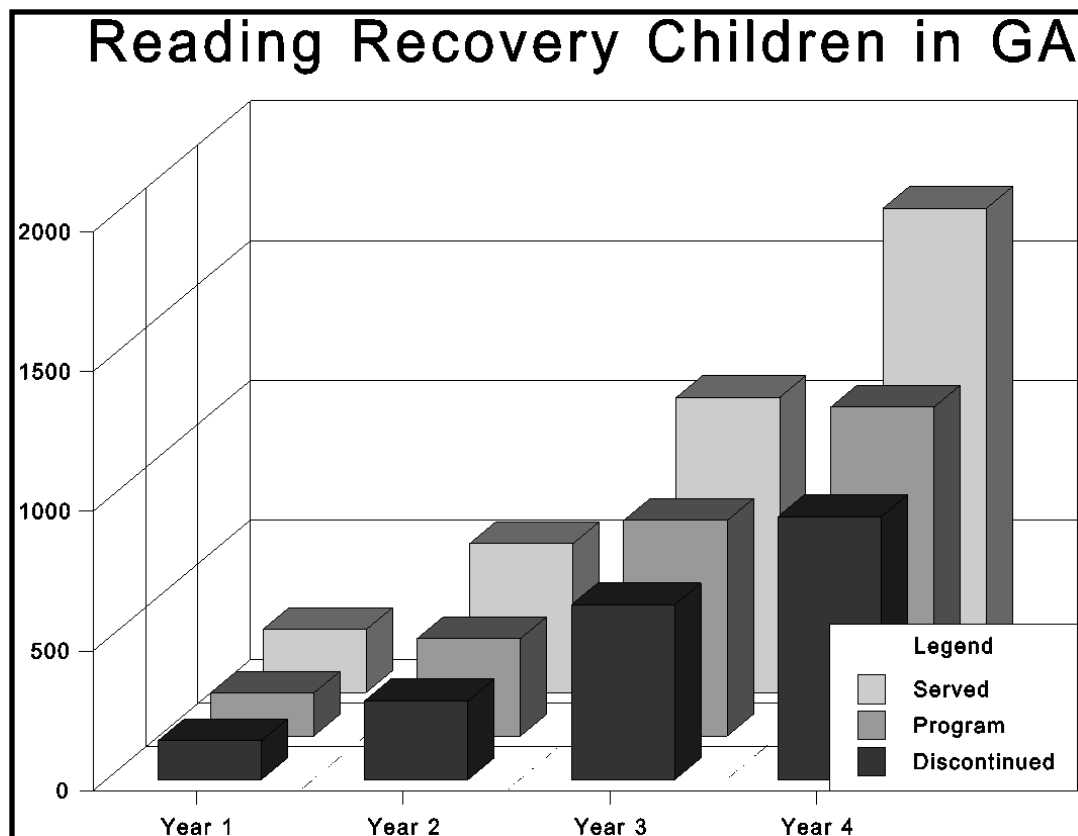
Reading Recovery in Georgia

The number of students in Georgia benefiting from Reading Recovery has grown rapidly since the program was affiliated with Georgia State University in the 1991-1992 school year. In its first four years, Reading Recovery has served more than 3,500 at-risk children in Georgia, with a successful discontinuing rate of over 80 percent of children receiving the complete program of at least 60 lessons.

Who Are Reading Recovery Children?

Reading Recovery serves children who have been identified as being in the lowest 20 percent of their class in terms of reading achievement by the observation survey along with their classroom teacher's professional judgment.

- **Children Served:** Children who have received at least one Reading Recovery lesson.
- **Program**

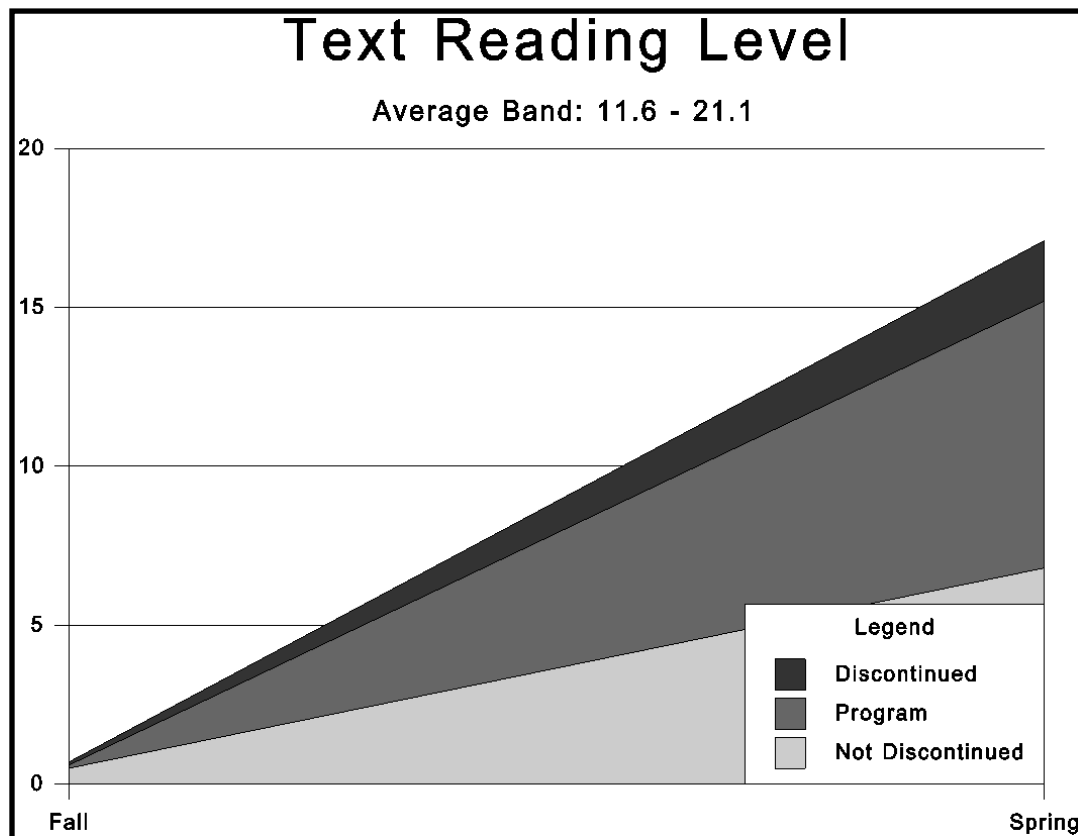


Children: Children who have received 60 or more lessons or have been successfully discontinued prior to that point.

- **Discontinued Children:** Children who are able to successfully read at or above the average level in their class and have been released from the program.

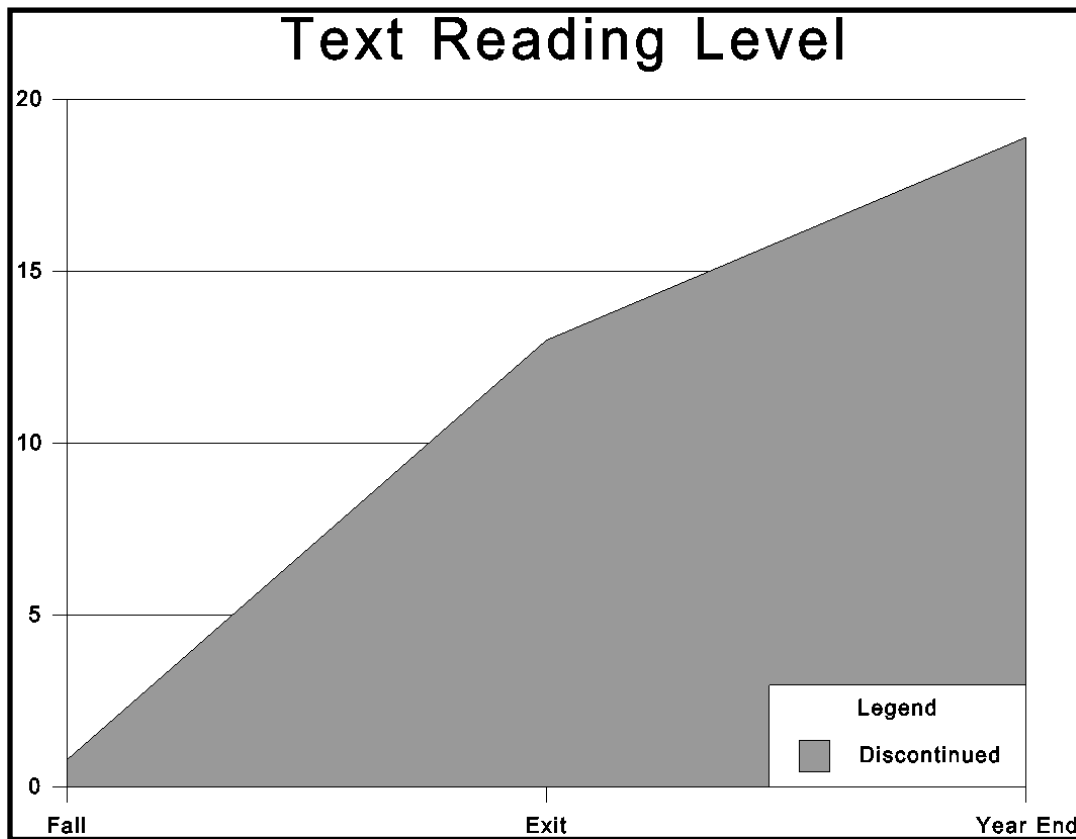
Do Reading Recovery Children Really Catch Up to their First Grade Peers?

Over the first four years of Reading Recovery in Georgia, 2526 children received the complete program, and 2040 (over 80 percent) of these were successfully discontinued because they had made accelerated progress and could read at the average level of their classmates. Even children who were not successfully discontinued from Reading Recovery still made substantial progress. Reading Recovery students begin the year at the lowest levels of reading achievement in



their class. By the end of the year, 82 percent of the Georgia Reading Recovery program children (successfully discontinued or not) were at or above average levels in writing vocabulary. The success rates for word dictation and text reading level were 88 percent and 77 percent, respectively. These data demonstrate that Reading Recovery enables children to make accelerated progress, allowing them to catch up with their peers in the first grade. Considering that the average band is drawn from students having middle and upper levels of reading achievement, this progress is indeed remarkable.

Do Reading Recovery Children Continue to Make Progress After They Finish the Program?



One of the goals of Reading Recovery is for children to develop self-extending systems that allow them to continue to learn without additional help beyond their regular classroom instruction. Children who enter the program early in the first grade are likely to be discontinued around mid-year and are expected to continue to make progress without further remedial help. The data indicates that successfully discontinued program children are able to continue learning through their regular classroom

instruction alone

Are the gains made in Reading Recovery sustained over time?

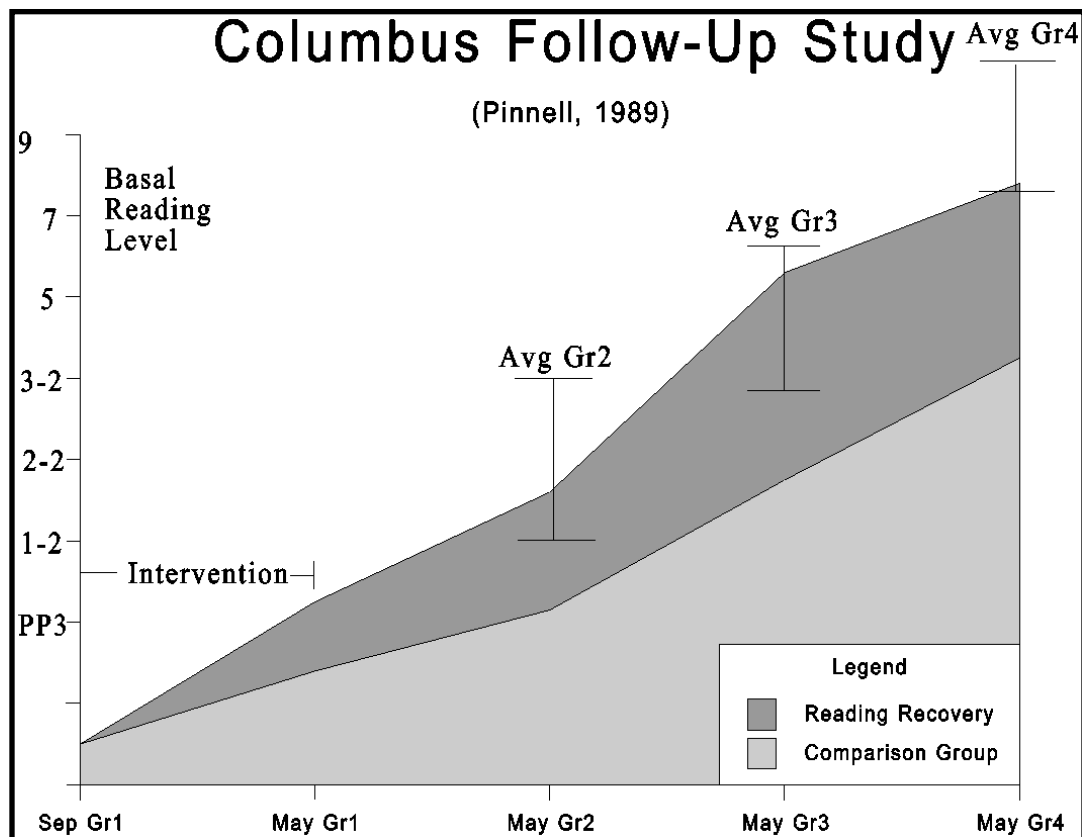
Research indicates that most Reading Recovery students not only become average or better readers in first grade, they develop a self-extending learning system, which enables them to continue learning at least as quickly as their peers in later grades.

The Columbus Follow-Up Study (Pinnell, 1989) showed that students served in Reading

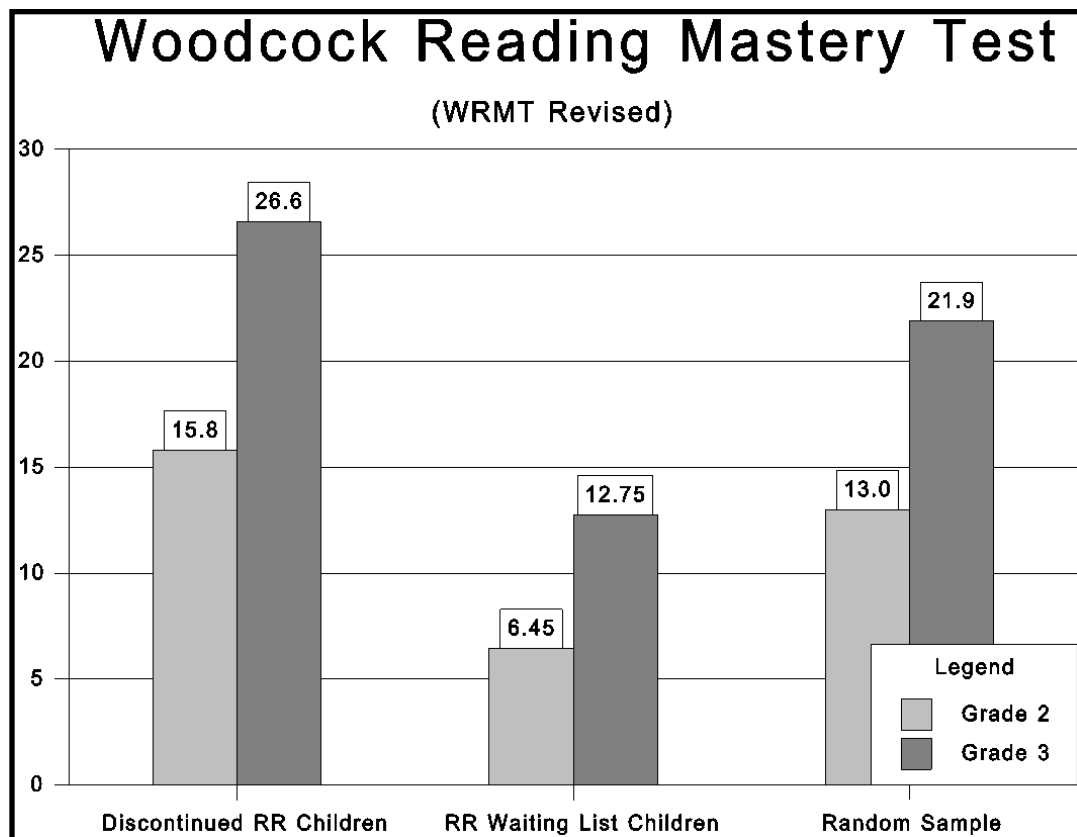
Recovery maintained progress in second, third, and fourth grade. Fourth grade Reading Recovery students demonstrated that they could accurately read text at the sixth-grade level or above. Additionally, these children proved to be excellent spellers, performing better than their randomly selected peers on a fifth-grade-level spelling test.

Regional studies have produced similar results. In June of 1992, for instance, researchers at New York University tested 174 second-grade children in New York who had successfully completed Reading Recovery as first graders in 1990-1991. Their performance on several measures was compared to that of a grade level random sample of 177 children. The following results highlight the strong residual effects of the program:

- Eighty-nine percent of Reading Recovery children scored within or above the average band on text reading compared to 80 percent of the random sample, and 23 percent of the Reading Recovery children scored above the average band.
- Ninety-six percent of the Reading Recovery children scored at grade two or above, compared to 89 percent of the random sample.
- At the end of second grade, the Reading Recovery children on average were able to read passages roughly equivalent to fifth-grade reading material with at least 90 percent accuracy.



A recently completed study in Georgia (Collins & Johnson, 1994) investigated the sustained effects of Reading Recovery on second- and third-grade children, showing that successfully discontinued children scored higher on the *Woodcock Reading Mastery Test* than both the comparison groups of children who needed Reading Recovery but did not receive it (RR waiting list children) and a random sample of non-Reading Recovery children.



How Does Reading Recovery Compare to Other Early Intervention Programs?

Large scale and local investigations demonstrate that Reading Recovery is a particularly effective method to improve the reading acquisition of at-risk children.

A recent study (Pinnell, Lyons, DeFord, Bryk, & Seltzer, 1994) compared Reading Recovery with four other types of early interventions: (1) an individual tutorial program similar to Reading Recovery, but taught by teachers with an abbreviated training program; (2) Direct Instructional Skills Plan (Cooter & Reutzler, 1987), an individual tutorial program taught by experienced reading teachers who had not had Reading Recovery training; (3) a small-group intervention taught by trained Reading Recovery teachers; and (4) a control group, which received a standard federally-funded remediation program.

The final report concluded that Reading Recovery children performed significantly better than children from an equivalent control group and the three other intervention programs. Reading Recovery was the only group that scored better on all tests, showing long-term improvements in reading. At the end of 70 days of instruction, Reading Recovery children were reading five levels ahead of children who received regular remedial reading lessons. Even though the control group continued to receive lessons for the rest of the year, Reading Recovery children were still three reading levels above the remedial group average when all children were tested the following fall.

Another investigation supported the findings of this study. Reading Recovery children were compared with a group of students similarly at risk and a reference group comprised of average performing first graders (Gregory, Earl, & O'Donoghue, 1993). The Reading Recovery children received daily Reading Recovery lessons plus regular classroom instruction. The comparison group received regular classroom instruction plus intervention services (ESL, special education, parent volunteers, private tutors). The reference group received regular classroom instruction only.

Researchers reported that Reading Recovery children scored higher than comparison students on end-of-year measures, that the performance of Reading Recovery children improved at a faster rate than their at-risk peers who did not receive Reading Recovery, and that Reading Recovery children made significantly greater gains than both their average-achieving classmates and the comparison group on results of the *Woodcock Reading Mastery Test*, the *Metropolitan Achievement Test*, a spelling assessment, and a miscue analysis.

Is Reading Recovery Cost-Effective?

Evidence indicates that Reading Recovery can reduce costs associated with at-risk students by lowering retention rates and reducing the need for other forms of remediation and special education.

Dyer (1992) found that while Reading Recovery requires an initial and ongoing investment, its implementation is economically as well as educationally sound. The study concluded that school districts using Reading Recovery will realize significant long-term savings through reductions in grade retentions, remedial Title I / Chapter 1 services, and special education placements -- savings that can more than offset the short-term costs of initiating and operating the program.

California Remedial Program	Students Served per Day	Minutes per Day	Length of Stay in Program	Total Cost per Student (1992 dollars)
Title I / Chapter 1	40	30	3-5 years	\$ 4552
Special Education	28	90-120	5-7 years	\$ 9104
Grade Retention	n/a	n/a	1 year	\$ 4598
Reading Recovery	4	30	16 weeks	\$ 2276

In an analysis of program costs similar to the one reported by Dyer, Swartz (1992) developed a comparison of expenditures for remedial programs and Reading Recovery in the State of California. Using average student caseloads and average costs per student provided by the California Department of Education and length-of-stay reported by practitioners, Reading Recovery costs were found to be half of those for Title I / Chapter 1 and grade retention and a quarter of those for special education placement. The cost figures and estimates of various program elements were purposefully kept conservative to guard against inflated cost-effectiveness claims.

Other researchers have reported positive results when they examined Reading Recovery's ability to reduce first-grade retentions, the need for further remediation, and the number of students classified as learning disabled:

- Lyons and Beaver (1995) found that the first-grade retention rate in a school district that had implemented Reading Recovery dropped from 4.3 percent in the three years before implementation to only 2.9 percent four years after system-wide implementation.
- The same study showed that the school district reduced its enrollment in LD classrooms at the end of the first grade from 32 students (1.8 percent of the first grade) in the three years before full implementation to 10 students (0.6 percent of the first grade) in three years after implementation.
- In their book *Partners in Learning*, Lyons, Pinnell, and DeFord (1993) documented the experience of a district that reduced its first-grade retentions by 33 in five years following the implementation of Reading Recovery, saving approximately \$170,000.

The impact of Reading Recovery extends beyond the students and teachers involved directly in the program. Researchers have also noted instances of districts where remedial reading teachers have become familiar with aspects of the program and have used their newly acquired practices to restructure their remedial reading classes in ways that significantly reduce the need for remedial reading placements beyond first grade (Lyons, Pinnell, & DeFord, 1993).

Reading Recovery does require a substantial financial commitment. However, considering its capacity for reducing the need for more costly interventions beyond first grade, it is a sound investment.