

# Effective Instruction for Middle School Students with Reading Difficulties

## The Reading Teacher's Sourcebook

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# About the Authors

**Carolyn A. Denton, Ph.D.**, is Associate Professor in the Children’s Learning Institute, part of the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston. A former teacher, she conducts research in schools focused on reading intervention, response to intervention models, coaching as a form of professional development, and reading comprehension. Her current projects include a study of reading comprehension in middle and high school students, a study of interventions for elementary-age children who have both attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and severe reading difficulties, and a project developing a Tier 2 first-grade intervention that targets both decoding and comprehension. She has served as the head of the Texas Adolescent Literacy Project, an initiative of the Texas Education Agency focused on the development of intervention approaches for struggling middle school readers. Dr. Denton is the coauthor of three other books, including a reading intervention program for the early grades and two books on the role of the reading coach, as well as numerous articles and book chapters. She has made presentations and provided training to teachers, administrators, coaches, researchers, and university faculties throughout the United States and in Europe and Hong Kong.

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**Jade Wexler, Ph.D.**, is Assistant Professor in the Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. Dr. Wexler has almost 15 years of experience as a teacher and researcher in the field of special education. She earned her Ph.D. in Special Education (Learning Disabilities and Behavior Disorders) in 2007 from the University of Texas at Austin, where she remains a fellow in the Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk Dropout Prevention Institute. She has extensive experience directing large-scale studies (funded by the National Institutes of Health, the Institute of Education Sciences, the Meadows Foundation, and the Greater Texas Foundation) investigating high-quality interventions for students with significant reading difficulties and students at risk for dropping out of school. Her current research focuses on investigating effective practices for adolescents with reading difficulties, including those in the juvenile justice system. She also investigates methods to decrease dropout rates and increase school engagement for students at risk for dropping out of school.

**Deanna Bryan** began her teaching career working with children with severe disabilities. While teaching in a life skills classroom, she met a student that she believed could learn to read. She began tutoring this student one on one and this is where her passion for teaching reading began. Ms. Bryan spent most of her teaching career working with middle school students. She was a public school special education reading teacher for 9½ years before going to work for the Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts at the University of Texas at Austin. At the Vaughn Gross Center, she worked as a research assistant and then as an instructional coach. She was also a member of the development team for the Texas Adolescent Literacy Academies. Ms. Bryan believes middle school teachers are special and feel they are called to work with this unique age group. She hopes that this book will serve these teachers well. Ms. Bryan currently resides in Austin, Texas, with her husband and two children.

**Deborah Reed, Ph.D.**, is Assistant Professor in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Texas at El Paso. She has spent 19 years working with adolescents as a middle and high school teacher, technical assistance provider, and researcher. While at the Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk, Dr. Reed served as Principal Investigator of the Texas Adolescent Literacy Academies, which resulted in the training of more than 21,000 content area and intervention teachers. She has also assisted the Florida Center for Reading Research and the IRIS Center at Vanderbilt in developing teacher-friendly resources for addressing adolescent literacy issues in both general and special education settings. Her publications have appeared in *Scientific Studies of Reading*, *Reading Psychology*, *Preventing School Failure*, *Research in Middle Level Education*, *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *Learning Disability Quarterly*, and *Educational Assessment*.

## Planning Checklist for Implementing Schoolwide Reading Intervention

### STEP 1. SELF-EVALUATION: REVIEW CURRENT READING PRACTICES WITHIN THE SCHOOL TO DETERMINE NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

- Does the school have a unified vision and plan for ensuring that all students are able to read and learn from academic text and are motivated to read? Are administrators and teachers committed to implementing the plan?
- Is there a safe and positive school environment that is conducive to learning?
- Do teachers and administrators have high academic standards for their students based on grade-level expectations?
- Do teachers provide effective instruction supported by strong instructional leadership from the principal or another person or persons in the school?
- Is academic achievement given priority in scheduling, budgeting, and allocation of personnel?
- Do content-area teachers consistently teach and encourage students to implement evidence-based vocabulary and comprehension strategies? Is the same limited set of strategies used across all classes?
- Are benchmark reading assessments administered three times per year to identify students who need supplemental reading classes or intervention?
- Do reading teachers or tutors implement research-supported programs and teaching approaches to provide strategic intervention to students who perform somewhat below grade level and have problems comprehending academic text?
- Do reading teachers or other teachers implement research-supported, explicit, systematic reading programs to provide intensive intervention to students with more severe reading difficulties?
- Is the progress of students in strategic and intensive intervention monitored regularly to determine whether they are responding adequately to intervention?

### STEP 2. DEVELOP A PLAN FOR COLLECTING, MANAGING, AND USING BENCHMARK AND PROGRESS-MONITORING DATA

- Who will administer benchmark assessments?
- Who will organize the results and analyze them to determine which students need strategic or intensive intervention?
- Reading teachers or interventionists should administer progress-monitoring assessments but may need some assistance. If so, who will assist them?
- Who will compile progress-monitoring data and display them as easily interpreted graphs or in other accessible formats?
- It is recommended that groups of reading teachers, other teachers, and, ideally, administrators meet regularly to examine the progress-monitoring data so that they can identify students who are not making adequate progress and collaborate to make plans for accelerating the progress of these students. Who will organize these meetings?

(continued)

**Figure 1.2.** Planning Checklist for Implementing Schoolwide Reading Intervention. (Adapted with permission from the Vaughn Gross Center for Reading and Language Arts at the University of Texas at Austin. [2005]. *Introduction to the 3-Tier reading model: Reducing reading difficulties for kindergarten through third grade students* [4th ed.]. Austin, TX: Author.)

### STEP 3. DEVELOP A SCHOOLWIDE PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING CONTENT-AREA STRATEGIES AND ROUTINES

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- If there is a need for professional development in a system of positive behavioral supports to ensure a safe and positive school environment, then who will provide this professional development and who will ensure that the system is implemented?
- Is there a plan for providing quality professional development to content-area teachers to prepare them to incorporate evidence-based vocabulary and comprehension strategies and to use collaborative grouping to increase active student involvement? Does this plan include ongoing support in the form of regular study group sessions and/or coaching?
- Are content-area teachers committed to implementing research-based strategies and routines across classes to ensure that students learn key vocabulary and are able to read and understand academic text in each discipline?
- Are content-area and reading teachers given adequate time to plan and collaborate to overcome obstacles to integrating these strategies and routines into their instruction?
- Is a system established for problem solving and decision making related to this component of school-wide intervention?

### STEP 4. DEVELOP A PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC INTERVENTION

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- Who will provide strategic intervention?
- Will strategic intervention take place in reading classes or in tutoring sessions?
- How will class sizes of 12–18 students be ensured?
- When will strategic intervention be provided?
- Where will strategic intervention be implemented?
- Is a system in place for monitoring the progress of strategic intervention students between one and two times per month and using the results to guide instructional decisions?
- Are criteria established for entry and exit from strategic intervention?
- How will assessment data be used to group and regroup students, to plan targeted instruction, and to make adaptations to ensure students meet grade-level benchmarks and/or objectives?
- Is a system established for problem solving and decision making related to strategic intervention?
- Is time provided for collaboration among reading intervention teachers?
- Who will ensure that reading interventionists receive quality professional development emphasizing scientific research-based programs and practices in teaching students with reading difficulties? Who will provide them with ongoing support?

Figure 1.2. (continued)

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## STEP 5. DEVELOP A PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING INTENSIVE INTERVENTION

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- Who will provide intensive intervention (e.g., reading teacher, special education teacher, other well-qualified teacher)?
- When and how often will intensive intervention be provided?
- Where will intensive intervention be implemented?
- What scientific research-based, explicit, systematic program(s) will be used to provide intensive intervention?
- Has the relationship of intensive intervention with Section 504 and special education services been clarified?
- Is a system in place for monitoring the progress of intensive intervention students between two and four times per month and using the results to guide instructional decisions?
- Are criteria established for entry and exit from intensive intervention?
- How will assessment data be used to plan targeted instruction and to make adaptations to ensure students meet grade-level benchmarks and/or objectives?
- Is a system established for problem solving and decision making related to intensive intervention?
- Is time provided for collaboration among intervention teachers?
- Who will ensure that intensive intervention teachers receive quality professional development emphasizing scientific research-based programs and practices in teaching students with reading difficulties? Who will provide them with ongoing support?

**Figure 1.2.** *(continued)*