A VALIDATION REPORT ON

READ 180

A print and electronic adaptive intervention program
Grades 4 and above

A SUMMARY OF INDEPENDENT RESEARCH ON READ 180
READ 180 Evolved From Research on Effective Practice

READ 180® is an intensive, adaptive intervention program designed to meet the needs of students in grades four through eight whose reading achievement is significantly below grade level. READ 180 utilizes direct and explicit reading instruction, engaging and age-appropriate content, and data-driven technology, to ensure that differentiated instruction and guided practice take place. Instruction is strictly based on the results of diagnostic and curriculum-embedded assessments, as well as periodic evaluations of student progress and mastery. In short, READ 180:

- Delivers individualized, adjusted reading instruction to move students up to grade level.
- Provides practice and the application of skills in multiple contexts to increase achievement.
- Supports and motivates students as they progress toward becoming lifelong readers and learners.

The development of READ 180 was a collaborative effort between Vanderbilt University and the Orange County Public School System in Florida. The prototype program, the Orange County literacy project, served more than 10,000 students from 1994 to 1999. These students made quantifiable improvements in reading and overall school achievement, as well as the development of more positive attitudes and behaviors. Building on findings from research and evaluation on the implementation and use of the prototype program, Scholastic enhanced the program in four ways. Specifically, the developers:

- Organized all content within CD-ROMs, audio books, and leveled libraries, and aligned these components with curriculum themes in Science and Math, History and Geography, and Peoples and Cultures, to build content literacy.
- Added a complete Scope and Sequence of phonics skills to the program content.
- Emphasized direct, explicit, and systematic instruction in reading comprehension, word analysis, phonics, spelling, and writing.
- Infused decodable text and leveled practice through content-area reading.
Ongoing Research in Urban Districts Continues to Yield Good News About Results for Struggling Readers

*READ 180* has been available for use in classrooms across the country since 1999. As the program was being adopted in hundreds of classrooms, Scholastic began investing in third-party evaluations to learn more about *READ 180*'s effects on student learning, as well as attitudes toward reading and attending school. The early results from three of these studies are in, and the news is good. Students who participate in *READ 180*, most of whom are struggling readers when they begin the program, show progress, often substantial progress, in learning to read. In addition to impressive gains in scores on standardized tests, such as the Stanford Achievement Test-9 (SAT-9), Terra Nova, and the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), numerous anecdotal reports from students and their teachers also attest to significant progress, as well as fundamental changes in student attitudes toward reading and going to school. Findings from several studies suggest that when the program is fully implemented, students make even greater gains.

Three large-scale studies, in particular, provide promising evidence of the positive impact of *READ 180*. These studies were conducted in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD); the Department of Defense (DoD) Schools; and in four large, urban school districts, in conjunction with the Council of Great City Schools. Not only can the results of these studies inform decisions about choosing *READ 180*, they also help in understanding the commitment necessary to ensure that students who can gain most from the program receive the full measure of its benefits.
In Los Angeles, *READ 180* was implemented district-wide as part of an Intensive Academic Support (IAS) initiative for eighth graders who were not performing well, as indicated by low grades in English, low scores on the SAT-9, and teacher reports. Indeed, most of the IAS students who participated in *READ 180* during the 2000-01 school year were repeating eighth grade. Exhibit 1 shows the results of this study. In this period, *READ 180* students’ SAT-9 reading scores increased, relative to national norms, from a Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) of 32.1 to 35.2, a gain of 3.1 NCEs. Over this same period, the SAT-9 reading performance of the average LAUSD comparison student—who did not receive special literacy instruction—declined relative to national norms by 6.7 NCEs, from 32.4 to 25.8. Results were similar for SAT-9 language arts scores: the average *READ 180* student gained 1.8 NCEs during the year (from 33.3 to 35.1), while the average comparison student lost 2.7 NCEs (from 33.1 to 30.4).

*Exhibit 1*

Los Angeles Unified School District

SAT-9 Scores for *READ 180* and non-*READ 180* Comparison Students

- Scores are expressed in Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs), an equal-interval scale. Positive NCE gains represent improvement compared with the national norming sample, a gain of zero represents staying the same with the norming sample, and negative NCE gains represent falling behind the national norming sample.
- Exhibit notes: The average *READ 180* student in Los Angeles gained 3.1 NCEs, from a score of 32.1 in Spring 2000 to a score of 35.2 in Spring 2001, on the reading SAT-9. During the same period, the average comparison student lost 6.7 NCEs, from 32.4 to 25.8.
In the study of READ 180 in the DoD schools, which are located in the United States and abroad, students in READ 180 classrooms made substantial gains on the Terra Nova standardized reading and language arts tests. As shown in Exhibit 2, in Reading, students in fully implemented READ 180 classrooms moved from an average score of 39.9 NCEs to 47.3, a gain of 7.5 NCEs. At the same time, similar students in classrooms that did not implement the full READ 180 model moved from an average score of 37.7 NCEs to 39.1, a gain of 1.4 NCEs. In Language Arts, students in fully implemented READ 180 classrooms gained from an average score of 41.2 NCEs to 45.9, an increase of 4.7 NCEs. During the same period, students in "off-model" classrooms declined on average from 39.8 to 38.2 NCEs.
READ 180 Is Working in Boston, Dallas, Houston, and Columbus

The results available from the Council of Great City Schools study are positive, as well. This study included the Boston Public Schools, the Dallas Independent School District, the Houston Independent School District, and the Columbus (Ohio) Public Schools. As shown in Exhibits 3 through 6, students who were weak readers when they began READ 180 improved their reading over the course of the year—by between 1.1 NCEs in Columbus to 9.3 NCEs in Houston. The results reported also suggest that READ 180 does help students improve their reading more than they would have if they had not participated in READ 180.
Exhibit 4
Council of Great City Schools Study
Boston SAT-9 Reading Scores for READ 180 and non-READ 180 Control Group

* Scores are expressed in Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs), an equal-interval scale. Positive NCE gains represent improvement compared with the national norming sample, a gain of zero represents staying pace with the norming sample, and negative NCE gains represent falling behind the national norming sample.

* Exhibit note: The average READ 180 student in Boston gained 2.8 NCEs, from a score of 32.3 in Spring 2000 to a score of 35.1 in Spring 2001, on the reading SAT-9. During the same period, the average comparison student gained 1.4 NCEs, from 34.4 to 35.8.

Exhibit 5
Council of Great City Schools Study
Houston SAT-9 Reading Scores for READ 180 and non-READ 180 Control Group Students

* Scores are expressed in Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs), an equal-interval scale. Positive NCE gains represent improvement compared with the national norming sample, a gain of zero represents staying pace with the norming sample, and negative NCE gains represent falling behind the national norming sample.

* Exhibit note: The average seventh grade READ 180 student in Houston gained 7.0 NCEs, from a score of 30.7 in Spring 2000 to a score of 37.7 in Spring 2001, on the reading SAT-9. During the same period, the average control student gained 3.3 NCEs, from 23.3 to 25.3.
In addition to the results from these formal research studies of READ 180, there is data on student learning generated by the READ 180 program itself. As part of READ 180, students’ reading proficiencies are assessed using the SRI. Based on SRI scores for over 1,000 READ 180 students in eight school districts, the average student experiences one-and-one-half to two years of reading growth during a year of READ 180. This represents a substantial increase over the gains normally expected for one year of instruction for these students.

READ 180 also appears to greatly improve students’ attitudes toward reading and their own reading abilities. Survey results from the DoD study and anecdotal reports from teachers, parents, and students all indicate that students are enthusiastic about READ 180, and that they become much more confident readers while participating in the program. Although not formally documented by the READ 180 research, other research on youth development suggests that these positive shifts in student attitudes can be important contributors to long-term success in school. And, as many teachers, principals, and parents point out, a lack of self-confidence is both a very common and very serious problem among low-performing students.
Findings from the DoD study and the Council of Great City Schools study point to the importance of local commitment to the program and to overcoming the challenges in implementation, so that students can garner the full measure of the program’s benefits. The DoD study strongly suggests that fidelity to the full READ 180 model is important in order to realize the full potential of the program for student achievement. Consistent with findings from other studies of school change, the Council of Great City Schools study found that a range of local factors affected the prospects for successful implementation of READ 180. These factors included a sound adoption process, relative stability in the student population, support from local leaders, and integration in the school structure. Teacher commitment and ownership of the program, along with ongoing professional development to support their work, are also important. The difficulties associated with increasing the literacy block, creating small classes, implementing an innovative instructional program, and careful use of the detailed student reports generated by READ 180 put a real premium on addressing these contextual factors. The challenges also affirm the need for professional development to ensure that teachers know how to take full advantage of the program and are committed to doing so.

The good news about promising results from READ 180 comes with conditions. In focusing on learning outcomes for READ 180 students, the evaluations did not always collect extensive data on whether the program had been fully implemented or on the characteristics and learning experiences of other students who were included in comparison groups. Moreover, with exceptions in Dallas and Houston, students were not randomly assigned to control groups. Therefore, while it seems clear that READ 180 students made positive gains, it is sometimes difficult to know with confidence how these gains compared to what gains would have occurred without READ 180, what other factors might have contributed to these gains, and what the READ 180 intervention actually looked like from one school to the next. In addition, because all of the research conducted thus far focuses on a single year, it will be important to learn more about the persistence of reading gains through subsequent years of schooling. Additional research, including research that is already under way, can help to clarify these issues. However, districts that use READ 180 need not wait for these results because one of the strengths of the program is that it generates its own solid data on student learning and progress. This data is available immediately and can be used easily for internal review and planning in classrooms, district offices, and schools.
Summing Up

Early research and evaluation are unequivocal in their findings that the implementation of READ 180 results in solid gains in student reading scores. These results are even more significant because they were achieved in some of the nation’s largest, urban school districts, with students who had fallen far behind their peers. Given the solid research on which the key program components rest, it is not surprising that the early studies of READ 180 also indicate that full implementation of the program results in greater gains than when the program is partially implemented. Subsequent research will yield more insights into how and why READ 180 works.
This analytic summary of READ 180 evaluation findings was prepared by Policy Studies Associates, Inc. (PSA).

PSA conducts research in education and youth development. Its studies span evaluation, policy analysis, and other forms of systematic inquiry. These projects integrate information from many sources to examine the operations and effects of programs to improve schooling and other services for children and youth. Clients include federal, state, and local government agencies; foundations; and other organizations that aim to use high-quality data to make policy decisions.

For more information about READ 180, please contact our office at 1-877-234-READ.