



## ***Using REWARDS Program to Teach Decoding, Vocabulary, and Reading Comprehension***

### **What is the evidence base?**

- This is an evidence-based practice for students with disabilities (SLD, ED, LD) based on three methodologically sound group experimental studies across
  - 74 students with SLD
  - 3 students with ED
  - 182 students with disabilities (not specified)
  - 135 students with LD

### **Where is the best place to find out how to do this practice?**

The best place to find out how to implement REWARDS Program is through the following research to practice lesson plan starters:

- [Using REWARDS Program to Teach Decoding, Vocabulary, and Reading Comprehension Across Content Areas \(Vaughn et al., 2011; Vaughn et al., 2015; Wanzek et al., 2011\)](#)

### **With whom was it implemented?**

- Students with disabilities (3 group experimental studies, n=397)
- Ages ranged from 11 - 14
- Males (n=31), females (n=12), not specified (n=317)
- Ethnicity
  - African American (n=78)
  - Caucasian (n=80)
  - Hispanic (n=49)
  - None reported (n=223)

### **What is the practice?**

REWARDS Program (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2003; 2005; 2006) is a specialized reading program designed for readers who struggle with multisyllabic words. The 6-week course features explicit instruction centered on daily lessons that are 50-60 minutes long and aim to increase fluency, comprehension, and academic vocabulary with a gradual release of responsibility to the student as their proficiencies grow. Students learn highly generalizable and transferrable word attack strategies that extend from the ELA classroom into the content areas (e.g., social studies/science).

Students:

- Learn flexible strategies for decoding grade-level multi-syllabic words
- Increase oral and silent reading fluency
- Expand their knowledge of general academic and domain-specific vocabulary
- Improve comprehension as decoding and fluency increase
- Read accurately, quickly, and with confidence

Skills targeted in the treatment package may include: vocabulary and reading comprehension techniques with opportunities for guided discussion to address student needs in understanding the words and text; explicit instruction in English phonology; recognizing high-frequency words accurately and quickly; and a strategy for applying phonics elements to reading multisyllable words.

In the studies used to establish the evidence base for using REWARDS Program to teach decoding, vocabulary, and reading comprehension included using a:

- Three-phase intervention: Phase 1 included 25 lessons (e.g., word recognition, phonological elements and advanced strategies for decoding multisyllabic words taught using the REWARDS Intermediate Program) over the course of 7-8 weeks (Vaughn et al., 2011; Wanzek et al., 2011) where students received daily instruction and practice with individual letter sounds, letter combinations, and affixes as well as application of a strategy to use word parts to decode and spell multisyllabic words. Fluency was promoted by using oral reading fluency data and pairing higher and lower readers for partner reading. Students engaged in repeated reading daily with their partner with the goal of increasing accuracy and rate. Vocabulary was addressed by teaching the meaning of words through basic definitions and providing examples and non-examples (pictures, sentences, demonstrations, etc., as appropriate) of how to use the words. Phase 2 of the intervention occurred over the course of 17-18 weeks emphasized vocabulary and comprehension, with additional instruction and practice provided for applying the word recognition and fluency elements learned in Phase 1, this time using REWARDS Plus Social Studies/Science lessons and materials. Phase 3 was implemented over the course of 8-10 weeks and continued emphasizing vocabulary and comprehension, with more time spent on independent student application of the skills and strategies introduced in Phase 2.
- The three-phase approach was used in Vaughn et al. 2011 but with an added Individualized Intervention Protocol that involved Individualized instruction including specified guidelines for use of instructional time. Students with higher-level decoding skills received 35 to 45 min of instruction in vocabulary/morphology, 170 to 180 min in comprehension/text reading, and 15 to 25 min of the motivational component during a 5-day week. Students with below-average word reading received 100 to 110 min of word study/text reading instruction, 35 to 45 min of vocabulary/morphology instruction, 70 to 80 min of comprehension/text reading instruction, and 15 to 25 min of the motivational component.

- Two phases were implemented in Vaughn et al., 2015. In Phase 1 students were explicitly taught an advanced word study strategy through the REWARDS Plus program where 6-8 words were taught weekly and provided with modeling and scaffolded supports to use a multistep comprehension strategy based on collaborative strategic reading. Phase 2 involved ongoing support was provided to students over the next year, requiring additional word-level work or practice with the comprehension strategies. Instruction was organized into 6- to 8-day instructional units, focusing on texts from students' content-area classes

### **Where has it been implemented?**

- Small class sizes (10-15 students per group); regular/special education classrooms

### **How does this practice relate to Common Core Standards?**

- Broad standard from [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org) ELA Grades
  - [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1/8.1](#)  
Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
  - [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4/8.4](#)  
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

### **How does this practice relate to the Common Career Technical Core?**

- List Career Ready Skills addressed (broad) and/ or Specific Career Clusters at [www.careertech.org/CCTC](http://www.careertech.org/CCTC)
  - 2. Apply appropriate academic and technical skills. Career-ready individuals readily access and use the knowledge and skills acquired through experience and education to be more productive. They make connections between abstract concepts with real-world applications, and they make correct insights about when it is appropriate to apply the use of an academic skill in a workplace situation.

### **References used to establish this evidence base:**

- Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Roberts, G., Barth, A. A., Cirino, P.T.,...Denton, C. A. (2011). Effects of individualized and standardized interventions on middle school students with reading disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 77, 391-407.
- Vaughn, S., Roberts, G., Schnakenberg, J.B., Fall, A., Vaughn, M.G., & Wekler, J. (2015). Improving reading comprehension for high school students with disabilities: Effects for comprehension and school retention. *Exceptional Children*, 82, 117-131.

Wanzek, J., Vaughn, S., Roberts, G., & Fletcher, J.M. (2011). Efficacy of a reading intervention for middle school students with learning disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 78*, 73-87.

This Practice Description was developed by The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT), Charlotte, NC, funded by Cooperative Agreement Number H326E140004 with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). This document has been reviewed and approved by the OSERS. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education. OSEP Project Officer: Dr. Selete Avoke. RSA Project Officer: Kristen Rhinehart-Fernandez. This product is public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted. While permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, the citation should be: National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (2019). *Using REWARDS Program to Teach Decoding, Vocabulary, and Reading Comprehension*.

