

North Shore Center LLC

Remediation for Struggling Readers is Possible

Phonological processing is a foundational skill required in learning to read text independently. The developments of these skills are most often the primary problem of a struggling reader. Before students begin to learn to read text, they must first become aware and manipulate individual bits of sounds we call phonemes within syllables. This skill, called phonemic awareness, prepares the student to link sounds to our writing system, the words of language in print. Once a child understands this he/she is ready to learn some of the more common letter and sound correspondences, ready to sound out simple unfamiliar words in print.

Students who have been in school three or four years and have not had sufficiently strong reading instruction will show two obvious difficulties when asked to read text at their grade level. They will not be able to fluently recognize a high a proportion of words in text or their attempts to identify words they do not immediately recognize will produce many errors.

Students who struggle learning to read are in all classrooms. As they get older, the gap between their 'reading' peers performance and their own widens, becoming increasingly more difficult to close without skilled instruction and sufficient practice time. Whether they Struggle learning to read because of instructional practices that do not meet their needs, are Economically disadvantaged, English Language learners, have Dyslexia or a Specific learning disability, these SEEDS students can be taught to read. Often very bright, these students learn reading differently and must be taught differently.

Though there are success stories, the intensity of reading instruction required to 'catch up' is not typically available to students during the school day. Too many times families and teachers do not have the knowledge, support, school services, or resources to get the help for a student with significant reading difficulties. We also know special education studies show students who receive remedial reading instruction in special education make one year's growth for each year of instruction, but rarely do they make the substantial improvements (two or three years growth) that are required in order to help them eventually "close the gap" with their same-age peers¹.

Whatever the cause, struggling readers will acquire skills they need to read, write, and spell if taught by a well trained and supported teacher using techniques designed to teach struggling readers with interventions appropriate to their needs. Providing this instruction as soon as possible will more quickly close gaps and will help both student and teacher. The challenge is ensuring high-quality initial reading instruction for these SEEDS students and

others who “fall through the cracks”. They all need reading instruction based on their skill weaknesses.

What can parents and educational professionals do to help students get the instruction they need to become a successful reader?

- The identification and remediation of reading difficulties requires professional teamwork and cooperation between home, school and other professionals.
- Seek out education about the characteristics of effective instruction for a struggling reader:
 - Systematic: Planned teaching of all useful correspondence patterns
 - Sequential: Planned sequence of instruction
 - Multisensory: Using listening, speaking, reading, and writing together
 - Explicit: Concepts are explained, not left to “discovery learning”
 - Cumulative: Ample practice of “old learning” with the introduction of new concepts
- Seek an independent professional evaluation from a qualified professional(s) to identify a student’s individual learning strengths and weaknesses.
- Find a certified reading teacher, practitioner or therapist effectively-trained² who meets the required standards to successfully instruct a student learning to read

¹(Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Winikates, & Mehta, 1997; Kavale, 1988; McKinney, 1990; Schumaker, Deshler, & Ellis, 1986; Zigmund, et al., 1995)

²<http://www.interdys.org/standards.htm>

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*ALTA certified, www.altaread.org, Cheryl helps individuals experiencing difficulty in learning to read, spell and write by using science-based methods to teach phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension skills. The principles of instruction are rooted in the Orton-Gillingham multisensory structured language approach.