

Interventions for Upper Elementary Struggling Readers - What Works?

Donegan, R. E., & Wanzek, J. (2021). Effects of reading interventions implemented for upper elementary struggling readers: A look at recent research. *Reading and Writing*, 34(8), 1943-1977.

WHAT DID THEY DO?

Researchers, Donegan and Wanzek, performed a review and analysis of research on reading intervention that occurred between 1988-2019. The evaluated research focused on upper elementary (grades 4 and 5). Within the 33 studies, there were a total of 4,565 participants, including students with or at risk for disabilities, and those labeled as struggling readers.

The review and analysis looked at intervention focus (foundational, comprehension, or multi-component), and the intensity in which the intervention was delivered (time, group size).

WHAT DID THEY FIND?

The researchers found that foundational only interventions provided small to moderate effects, medium to large effects for comprehension only interventions, and medium to large effects for multi-component interventions.

• Foundational Intervention

- Studies around foundational reading interventions showed small effects; however, when interventions include a combination of foundational skills, more positive effects were noted. When foundational intervention was delivered by a trained professional and coupled with a computerized program, large, positive effects were found.

• Comprehension Intervention

- The researchers found that, overall, comprehension interventions led to small effects on student outcomes. Greater effects are seen when comprehension intervention is direct and explicit, and multi-component.

• Intensity of Intervention

- In general, the researchers found no systematic evidence that interventions composed of smaller groups and implemented for longer durations result in larger effects. Some of the reviewed research did indicate that smaller groups led to more positive outcomes; however, other factors of the delivered intervention may have contributed to the effect.

WHAT COULD THIS MEAN FOR TEACHERS?

- Small group sizes are most effective when intervention is focused on comprehension.
- Multi-component interventions lead to greater outcomes than interventions solely focused on one component.
- Foundational skill interventions for older students needs to go beyond single syllable words.
- Research is still ongoing and upper grade students have diverse needs. As such, interventions should be chosen carefully when identifying supports for students.

