

18. Reading First

Statutory Requirement: Sections 1201-1208

Overview

The No Child Left Behind Act established Reading First as a high-quality research-based program for America's K-3 students. The Reading First initiative builds on the findings of years of scientific research, which, at the request of Congress, were compiled by the National Reading Panel. Ensuring every child receives effective reading instruction in the early grades is critical.

Reading First is a focused nationwide effort to enable all students to become successful early readers. Funds are dedicated to help states and local school districts eliminate the reading deficit by implementing high-quality, comprehensive reading instruction in kindergarten through grade 3.

Purposes—Section 1201

The purpose of Reading First is to ensure all children in America learn to read well by the end of third grade.

The Reading First program helps states and districts apply scientifically based research—and the proven instructional and assessment tools consistent with the research—to teach all children to read. By teaching all children to read well by the end of third grade, we will ensure that all students advance to later grades well prepared to achieve to their full academic potential.

The Reading First program provides the necessary assistance to states and districts to establish research-based reading programs for students in kindergarten through third grade, focusing on the five essential components of reading:

- phonemic awareness
- phonics
- fluency
- vocabulary
- comprehension

Reading First funds also focus on providing significantly increased professional development to ensure all teachers, including special education teachers, have the skills they need to teach reading effectively. Additionally, the program provides assistance to states and districts in preparing classroom teachers to effectively screen, identify, and overcome reading barriers facing their students.

Quite simply, Reading First focuses on what works and supports proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms. The program provides assistance to states and districts in selecting or developing effective instructional materials, programs, learning systems, and strategies to implement methods proven to successfully teach reading. Reading First also provides assistance for the selection and administration of screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based instructional reading assessments with proven validity and reliability in order to screen and monitor student progress and achievement.

Reading First aims to strengthen district coordination by having Reading First schools share their knowledge of research-based programs with other schools in the district. Reading First schools should coordinate efforts with early literacy and family literacy programs to improve reading achievement for all children.

Formula Grants to State Educational Agencies—Section 1202

Eligibility Criteria

School districts or schools that met both of the following criteria were eligible to apply to the state educational agency for Reading First funds:

- Over 30 percent of the 3rd or 4th grade students were low scoring (below Proficient) or schools that had 100+ low-scoring students in Reading on the *Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations* (WKCE) or the *Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test* (WRCT); the highest priority schools demonstrated patterns of “low scoring” (below proficient) on the state reading assessments over the prior four years’ tests.

AND

- LEAs with at least 15 percent or more of its students were from families with incomes below the poverty line (Title I eligible);

OR

- 6,500 children served by the eligible school district were from families with incomes below the poverty line;

OR

- The school district was in a geographic region that included Empowerment Zones or Enterprise Communities;

OR

- One or more of the schools were in Improvement Status (INOI).

Use of Funds

Reading First funds may be used for, but are not limited to:

- New core reading programs
 - Harcourt 2003 (from Wisconsin’s recommended list)
 - Houghton Mifflin 2003 (from Wisconsin’s recommended list)
 - Macmillan/McGraw Hill 2003 (from Wisconsin’s recommended list)
 - Open Court/SRA 2002 (from Wisconsin’s recommended list)
 - Scott Foresman 2002 (from Wisconsin’s recommended list)
- Supplemental and intervention materials
- Reading-related capital and noncapital items
- Professional development

Additional Use of Funds

- Humanities-based family literacy programs that bond families around the acts of reading and using public libraries.
- Providing training in the essential components of reading instruction to a parent or other individual who volunteers to be a student’s reading tutor.
- Assisting parents to encourage reading and support their child’s reading development through the use of materials and reading programs, strategies, and approaches to (including family literacy services) based on scientifically based reading research.

Note: An eligible local educational agency that receives a subgrant under this subsection may use not more than 3.5 percent of the funds provided under the subgrant for planning and administration.

Charter Schools

Under state law, public charter schools are generally either local educational agencies or public schools within an LEA. As such, public charter schools are eligible for support on the same basis as other public schools or LEAs in the state.

If state law recognizes a charter school as an LEA and the charter school meets the eligibility requirements outlined above, it may apply to its state educational agency for a subgrant as an LEA. If a charter school is a school within an LEA, it may receive funding through its LEA's subgrant if it meets the criteria outlined above.

Private Schools

In Wisconsin, private schools in the attendance area of a Reading First school may be incorporated into the grant.

Funds provided for educational services and other benefits for private school children and their teachers must be equal to the funds provided for participating public school children taking into account the number and educational needs of the children to be served.

All services and benefits provided to private school children and their teachers under Reading First must be secular, neutral, and non-ideological and must be provided in a timely manner.

State Reserves

A state educational agency that receives a Reading First grant may reserve up to 20 percent of its total allocation to carry out activities related to professional inservice and preservice development; technical assistance for local educational agencies and schools; and planning, administration, and reporting.

These funds will assist states in building and maintaining statewide capacity to teach all children to read by the end of third grade.

Funds reserved for state use shall be used for the following purposes:

1. Professional Inservice and Preservice Development and Review

- a. **Development and implementation of a program of professional development** for teachers of kindergarten through grade 3, including English Language Learner (ELL) teachers, media specialists, and special education teachers that will prepare these teachers in all the essential components of reading instruction.
- b. **Strengthening and enhancing preservice courses** for students preparing, at public institutions of higher education in the state, to teach kindergarten through grade 3.
- c. **Improving state licensure and certification standards** by making recommendations on the improvement of standards in the area of reading.

2. Technical Assistance for Local Educational Agencies (one or both of the following)

- a. **Assisting local educational agencies** in accomplishing the tasks required to design and implement a Reading First program.
- b. **Providing expanded opportunities** to students in kindergarten through grade 3 who are served by eligible local educational agencies to receive reading assistance from alternative providers.

3. **Planning, Administration, and Reporting**—including administering competitive subgrants to eligible local educational agencies, using valid and reliable measures to assess and evaluate on a regular basis whether local educational agency Reading First activities have been effective in increasing the number of children in grades 1 through 3 served by Reading First who can read at or above grade level, and meeting reporting requirements.

State Formula Grant Applications—Section 1203

Wisconsin's Reading First initiative receives approximately \$11 million annually. The average Reading First grant is \$138,000 per year. Schools may receive funding from 3-6 years depending on need, progress, and continued availability of funding. Reading First is not expecting to add additional schools to the project at this time.

Targeted Assistance Grants—Section 1204

Reading First Targeted Assistance grants will be available, on a competitive basis, to state educational agencies that demonstrate an increase in student achievement related to the Reading First program. In order to receive a Targeted Assistance grant, an SEA must demonstrate that increasing percentages of third graders in each of several groups in local educational agencies receiving Reading First funds are reaching the proficient level for each of two consecutive years (beginning in 2006-07).

Note: These grants should not be confused with Title I basic grants targeted assistance programs. (See Title I Guidelines Section 12.)

External Evaluation—Section 1205

Each state educational agency that receives Reading First funds must assess and evaluate, on a regular basis, the progress of local educational agencies that receive subgrants in meeting the goals of the Reading First program. Wisconsin is contracting with Learning Points Associates, an independent evaluator, to assess the Reading First program.

National Activities—Section 1206

National activities may be found at: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg4.html>

Information Dissemination—Section 1207

Information dissemination may be found at: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg4.html>

Definitions—Section 1208

Definitions related to Reading First may be found in the glossary.