

# Florida Center for Reading Research

## Read Well

### What is Read Well?

*Read Well* is a beginning reading program designed for kindergarten and first grade students and for second and third grade students in need of remediation. The goal of *Read Well* is to provide students with the foundational skills critical to reading with understanding. *Read Well's* inclusive framework incorporates three programs: *Read Well K*, *Read Well 1*, and *Read Well Plus*. While each program is separate, when used flexibly as part of the *Read Well* framework, the program states that it is a comprehensive program that meets the needs of a wide range of readers. High performing kindergarten students for example, may finish *Read Well K* before the end of the year and would be able to begin *Read Well 1*. First grade students who finish *Read Well 1* in the middle of the year would continue with *Read Well Plus*. For students in *Read Well 1* who need extra practice, it is possible to cross over to *Read Well K* due to the two programs' parallel sequence of skills. Upon successful completion of *Read Well Plus*, students are reading at a 2.5 level or above.



The main focus of the programs within the inclusive *Read Well* framework is small group instruction that is mastery based, flexible, and guided by individual, ongoing assessments. Small groups are adjusted frequently based on student performance. The end-of-unit assessments allow teachers to evaluate the progress and needs of each student and to decide whether immediate, intensive intervention or acceleration is warranted. Whole class instruction, which is part of *Read Well K* and *Read Well 1*, supports the skills and content learned in small group instruction. Several implementation models and lesson plan pacing options are explicitly outlined in the Getting Started program guide to assist schools and teachers in tailoring instruction according to the varying needs of their students. These fully planned lessons for each unit are specifically detailed for differentiated instruction and range from 2 day to 12 day plans.



In a typical *Read Well* lesson, the teacher teaches each small group daily for 30 minutes, with 15 minutes of decoding practice and 15 minutes of story reading. *Read Well* units are thematically based and sounds and words used in decoding instruction are linked to the unit's stories, further enhancing students' ability to make meaningful connections. Each new unit usually begins with one new letter sound which serves as the stimulus for all activities that follow. The new letter sound is related to a word which is related to the theme students will read about later in the lesson. Next, skills that have been previously introduced and mastered by the students are put into immediate practice through the reading of connected text. *Read Well* provides a unique story format that includes two types of stories: duet stories and solo stories. The duet stories consist of teacher-read text embedded with fully decodable student text; students read the decodable parts and the teacher reads the other parts. The duet stories provide students with rich content, sophisticated vocabulary, and the chance to actively participate in this higher level reading. The solo stories are fully decodable and are read by the students. Vocabulary and comprehension instruction take place within the context of story reading, using expository and narrative texts.

The *Read Well* materials are well organized and clearly written. Assessment manuals contain individual assessments for student placement within groups and appropriate lessons as well as specific information pertaining to assessment administration. The Teacher's Guides include unit objectives for each lesson and detailed lesson plans with specific steps for lesson implementation. A separate scope and sequence exists for phonics instruction, and for vocabulary and comprehension instruction. Each program includes an Implementation Manual, individually bound Teacher's Guides for each unit, blackline masters with activities that reinforce small group instruction, student story books, sound and word cards, blending cards, CDs of songs and poems, and a host of other materials and manipulatives that reinforce instruction. In addition to the aforementioned materials, *Read Well K* includes theme related stories for teacher read aloud, whole class Teacher's Guides, and a children's literature set. The individual programs within the *Read Well* inclusive framework as well as the Activity Centers and the Spelling and Writing Conventions are purchased separately; in order to be considered a comprehensive K-1 program, it is necessary that all the materials be purchased and implemented.

### Is Read Well aligned with Current Research?

The inclusive *Read Well* framework incorporates the following important instructional components into daily lessons: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Differentiation is at the heart of the *Read Well* programs and it is strategically woven into many levels: placement at different points in the program, pacing of the lessons, small group instruction that is explicit and systematic, review lessons, extra practice lessons, the use of scaffolding, and immediate corrective feedback. Additionally, instructional routines introduce new skills and concepts through teacher modeling, followed by guided practice, and conclude with individual and independent practice. These aspects of instructional design and instructional delivery offer students the possibility to continually improve their skills at an appropriate pace.

Phonemic awareness and phonics activities include sound review, sound introduction, sound isolation, rhyming, segmenting and blending, sounding out of words, and irregular word work. The lesson content will vary slightly for each program. In *Read Well Plus*, students learn variant spellings and pronunciations, common prefixes and suffixes, the long e rule, and decoding multisyllabic words. Some phoneme manipulation activities occur in extra practice lessons and in a few dictation exercises. Given the helpfulness of this type of manipulation activity in scaffolding understanding with one-to-one correspondence, it could be beneficial for teachers to use these activities with all students, rather than waiting for the extra practice activities for the most struggling readers.

Vocabulary words related to the unit theme are taught explicitly with student friendly definitions. The words are repeated in several different contexts, within and across units, through the use of teacher read aloud, teacher-student discussion, and student decoding practice and story reading. While the vocabulary words occur in many contexts, they are not systematically reviewed, which may be problematic for students with limited vocabulary.

The *Read Well* programs develop fluency through several avenues: by assisting students to achieve mastery of letter sound relationships and other phonics skills, with immediate application of those skills in oral readings of decodable text, with repeated and timed readings, and with coaching of expressive reading. Additionally, struggling

readers are provided with opportunities to develop fluency through extra practice lessons and proper placement into small groups.

The *Read Well* programs have a strong focus on comprehension, particularly with building background knowledge, helping students to make connections with their own lives, prediction, summarization through story retell, and learning elements of story grammar. Interactive teacher-student discussion and questioning during teacher read aloud and during small group story reading represent the main vehicle of comprehension instruction. Questions are written in the text at point of use and are selected to draw students' attention to the main idea and important details of the story. Inferential questions such as "how" and "why" tap students' ability to think more deeply about the story. Comprehension skill work is usually in the form of worksheets that emphasize sentence completion, selecting the correct response, question answering through sentence writing, fact sheet exercises to write guided reports, and story maps. These written activities appear gradually over the units of instruction, beginning in *Read Well 1*.

There are some important considerations for schools who wish to purchase the *Read Well* programs. 1) Although many helpful scheduling options are offered by *Read Well*, they often include an additional teacher or an assistant. The scheduling options are a positive feature of *Read Well* but may pose problems for schools with limited resources. However, *Read Well* professional development trainers will work alongside school-based decision makers to develop scheduling and grouping options based on each school's available resources. 2) In *Read Well K*, the discussion comments and questions provided for the read aloud literature must be copied onto sticky notes by the teacher and placed into the books, which is a time consuming process. It would ease the teacher's preparation if the pre-written questions on sticky notes were included with the program materials. 3) In *Read Well 1*, the read aloud literature to complement each unit is suggested but not provided. The company states that the literature will be available for purchase in an upcoming catalog. 4) The programs within the inclusive *Read Well* framework may not provide a sufficient number of practice stories for higher performing students.

*Read Well* provides initial and ongoing professional development for teachers, coaches, and administrators with the goal of building a district's capacity to sustain long-term intervention. This model of professional development begins with strong publisher support which is gradually diminished over a 6 year period of implementation while the district support is increased. This model varies slightly per state and there is a fee for professional development.

### Research Support for Read Well



*Read Well* was published in 1998 and incorporates research-based practices that have proven to be effective for diverse learners. A number of pilot evaluations and single subject studies suggest that use of the *Read Well* program has had positive results. This report will summarize two evaluations, one in which *Read Well* was used as an intervention, and one district wide evaluation in which *Read Well* was implemented as a core reading program using *Read Well K* and *Read Well 1*. The first evaluation used *Read Well 1*.

A study was initiated in 17 bilingual classrooms from 5 schools in a central Texas district to evaluate whether research based approaches to early reading interventions for native English speaking students could be effective for Spanish speaking students who were making the transition to English reading (Denton, Anthony, Parker, & Hasbrouck, 2004). According to demographic information, 56.2%

of the students in this district received free and reduced lunch, and approximately 9% had limited English proficiency, and 7.3% were served by bilingual or English as a Second language programs. Participants (n=93) in the study had to be bilingual, have Spanish as their native language, have adequate oral English proficiency to benefit from tutoring in English, have basic proficiency in Spanish reading, and had to have been recommended by their teacher because of their difficulty with reading in English. Participating students were from a wide range of grade levels (2-5) because of their similar performance in English reading. Based on students' instructional needs, two programs were chosen for this study, *Read Well* (Sprick, Howard & Fidanque, 1998), and a modified version of Read Naturally (Ihnot, 1992). (For the FCRR Report of Read Naturally, go to [http://www.fcrr.org/FCRRReports/PDF/read\\_naturally\\_final.pdf](http://www.fcrr.org/FCRRReports/PDF/read_naturally_final.pdf).) The research question for this study examined whether students in the *Read Well* and Read Naturally groups had significantly higher rates of growth over 10 weeks in English decoding and comprehension than did students in non-tutored comparison groups. Based on scores of the word attack subtest of the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised (WRMT-R; Woodcock, 1987), students were assigned to one of two ability groups. Within these two groups, students were closely matched into pairs based on pretest scores of the Word Identification, Word Attack, and Passage Comprehension subtests of the WRMT-R. Then, students were randomly assigned, one member of each matched pair to either a treatment or comparison group for one of the two interventions. Students in need of English decoding instruction were assigned to *Read Well*, and students who were decoding with ease but in need of instruction to improve reading comprehension were assigned to Read Naturally. Over a 10 week period, students received tutoring 3 times per week for 40-minute sessions during the school day. There were 1-4 students per group for each tutor. Tutors were undergraduate students enrolled in a class in teaching students with reading difficulties. The tutors were supervised by graduate students who were experienced teachers.

The WRMT-R subtests were used at pretest and at posttest and scores were analyzed using analysis of variance with repeated measures. For the *Read Well* program, there were significant results only for the word identification subtest,  $p = .023$ , and for Read Naturally, there were no significant results. Given the short duration of the intervention, it is encouraging that students learning to read English made progress in word reading. Further studies with a more comprehensive implementation, as intended by *Read Well*, may yield more information about the strength of the *Read Well* program.

A final study was conducted with kindergarten (n=72) and first grade students (n=72 in three elementary schools in Mississippi during the 2005-2006 school year (Cambium Learning, 2007). The study examined whether students at-risk for reading difficulties who use the *Read Well* program experience a level of accelerated growth that brings their performance closer to the level of the grade-level peers who receive instruction in beginning reading programs other than the *Read Well* program. A mixed methods design with a comparative component was used for this study. After the results of two screening tests administered before pretest, students were assigned to classrooms using the *Read Well* program if they were among the 15 lowest performing students in their school and were identified as at-risk on screening measures; the remaining students who were not at-risk were assigned to classrooms using two comparison programs. One program was a basal reading program and the other was a literature-based reading program. While all of the programs included some degree of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension instruction, the three programs varied in the explicit and systematic nature of instruction.

Over a 13-week period, kindergarten students were supposed to receive 60 minutes of daily instruction and first graders were supposed to receive 90 minutes of daily instruction. The *Read Well* program is described in the body of this report. Teachers using the basal reading program added teacher designed activities covering phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Most instruction was whole group except for oral reading fluency. The literature-based program included an added phonics component in which students received whole group instruction. Teachers used games, internet activities, and other activities in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary. Teacher-designed centers were used to teach comprehension. Assessment measures for pre- and posttest and for screening throughout the study were the DIBELS subtests and the Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation (GRADE+; Williams, 2001). The Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI; Foorman, Fletcher, Francis, Carlson, Chen, Mouzaki, Schatschneider, Wristers, & Taylor, 1998) was given to kindergarten students to determine the percentage of students who had not yet developed key literacy skills before and after the study.

Subtest scores for DIBELS and GRADE+ were analyzed using separate analyses of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures for kindergarten and for first grade. Results of such difference score analyses must be interpreted with caution given effects of regression to the mean. Read Well students were compared to a combination of basal and literature-based students. The main research question was whether Read Well would bring the performance of at-risk students within the average range, over a 13-week period, as defined by the comparison group and by the normative sample in the GRADE+. Accordingly, significant time by group interactions were the focus of statistical analyses. In kindergarten, there were significant time by group interactions for Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF; ES = 1.47) and Nonsense word Fluency (ES = .57) from DIBELS. On PSF, Read Well students improved from the 43<sup>rd</sup> percentile to the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile, while comparison students improved from the 58<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 65<sup>th</sup> percentile. On GRADE+, Read Well students' gain in Phoneme Grapheme Correspondences and Listening Comprehension was significant, whereas comparison students' gain was not (ES = -.47 and .88, respectively). In first grade, there was a significant time by group interaction on Phonemic Segmentation Fluency in DIBELS (ES = 1.18). Read Well students increased from the 76<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 84<sup>th</sup> percentile, while the comparison students decreased from the 69<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 32<sup>nd</sup> percentile. A multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on scores from the DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) and Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) measures. There was a significant time by group interaction on NWF (ES = .80), whereby Read Well students' scores increased from the 44<sup>th</sup> to the 49<sup>th</sup> percentile and the comparison students' decreased from the 53<sup>rd</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile. Finally, there were no significant time by group interactions on the GRADE+ composite.

While these results are positive for the use of *Read Well* with struggling readers in kindergarten and first grade in the areas of segmenting phonemes, phoneme-grapheme correspondences, listening comprehension, and phonemic decoding, instruction in *Read Well* did not increase total reading scores on the GRADE+ for kindergarten or for first grade students. In terms of raising student performance to average levels, one of the goals of this study, Read Well kindergartners, who had begun the study performing more than one standard deviation (SD) below the national average on a measure of total reading, improved their performance within one-fifth of a standard deviation. Read Well first grade students, who had begun the study 1.3-1.6 SDs below the national average on vocabulary and comprehension on the GRADE+,

showed 0.5 SD improvement in vocabulary and 0.25 SD improvement in comprehension. There are some additional limitations to this study. First, *Read Well* classrooms had one teacher, a paraprofessional, and an interventionist which is not usually typical in classrooms. Another factor was the impact of Hurricane Katrina which caused a loss of one to four weeks of instructional time. Then, there were a small number of participants which reduces statistical power. In addition, there were many univariate analyses on correlated outcome variables, which increase the likelihood of finding significant findings when in fact they would not be significant under more conservative statistical approaches. Finally, teachers in the comparison classrooms were more experienced than teachers in *Read Well* classrooms.

We conclude that the instructional content and design of *Read Well* is consistent with the most recent research in reading. These studies demonstrate that exposure to *Read Well K* and *Read Well 1* increase student performance on reading and language standardized test scores. To date, there are no studies of the inclusive *Read Well* framework. Future independent, well-designed evaluations of the three programs within the inclusive *Read Well* framework with randomized treatment and control groups could further lend support and strengthen the positive results summarized from the above studies.

## Strengths & Weaknesses

### Strengths of *Read Well*:

- Systematic and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency vocabulary and comprehension is included in the program daily.
- The program uses on-going assessments in order to differentiate instruction and meet instructional needs of students.
- The programs are assessment driven, provide students multiple entry points, and provide varied formats for differentiation in an attempt to meet the needs of all readers.
- Tips for English Language Learners are part of each unit.
- The Teacher's Guide in each unit includes unit objectives, specific details for lesson differentiation, explicit teaching tips, and research information that supports the type of instruction used.
- The CD of songs and chants offers a motivating format for students to receive extra practice in phonemic awareness and alphabet knowledge.

### Weaknesses of *Read Well*:

- The implementation manuals of *Read Well* state that whole class instruction is encouraged, which could be misleading. In order to be considered a comprehensive reading curriculum, whole class instruction should be required.

## Which Florida counties have schools that implement *Read Well*?

Florida counties that implement *Read Well K*, *Read Well 1*, *Read Well Plus*:

|        |              |
|--------|--------------|
| Citrus | 352-726-1931 |
| Orange | 407-317-3202 |

Florida counties that implement *Read Well K*:

|          |                         |         |              |
|----------|-------------------------|---------|--------------|
| Brevard  | 321-631-1911            | Levy    | 352-486-5231 |
| Broward  | 754-321-2600            | Marion  | 352-671-7702 |
| Citrus   | 352-726-1931            | Orange  | 407-317-3202 |
| DeSoto   | 863-494-4222            | Osceola | 407-870-4008 |
| Franklin | 850-653-8831 (ext. 102) | Volusia | 386-734-7190 |
| Hernando | 352-797-7001            |         |              |

Florida counties that implement *Read Well 1*:

|          |                         |            |              |
|----------|-------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Brevard  | 321-631-1911            | Highlands  | 863-471-5564 |
| Broward  | 754-321-2600            | Jefferson  | 850-342-0100 |
| Citrus   | 352-726-1931            | Levy       | 352-486-5231 |
| DeSoto   | 863-494-4222            | Monroe     | 305-293-1400 |
| Dixie    | 352-498-6131            | Palm Beach | 561-434-8200 |
| Duval    | 904-390-2115            | Polk       | 863-534-0521 |
| Franklin | 850-653-8831 (ext. 102) | Orange     | 407-317-3202 |
| Hernando | 352-797-7001            | Osceola    | 407-870-4008 |

## For More Information

<http://www.readwell.net>

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Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

For more information about FCRR go to: [www.fcrr.org](http://www.fcrr.org)