

# Florida Center for Reading Research

S.P.I.R.E. and Sounds Sensible  
(Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence)

## What are Sounds Sensible and S.P.I.R.E.?

*Sounds Sensible* and *S.P.I.R.E.* are two reading programs developed by Sheila Clark-Edmunds, an Orton-Gillingham fellow, to provide accessible materials to assist teachers' implementation of an Orton-Gillingham based approach to reading instruction. Although the programs are published separately they can also be purchased together as the *Complete Teacher Set with Sounds Sensible* and when combined are considered a comprehensive intervention program for kindergarten through eighth grade students. The purpose of this report is to first describe each program and its components individually and then identify how *Sounds Sensible* in conjunction with *S.P.I.R.E.* creates a comprehensive intervention program.

*Sounds Sensible* can be used as a stand alone phonological awareness and beginning phonics program. The author recommends small groups of three to five students for 45 minute daily lessons as the optimal instructional format. The scope and sequence of *Sounds Sensible* is clearly delineated in the teacher's guide. It is suggested that complete implementation can take place within a 6-9 month period. This program begins with phonological awareness at the sentence level and progresses to the phoneme level. Sound/symbol correspondences are taught for all single consonants and the vowel "a." A typical lesson is divided into five steps: step 1- listening, step 2- rhyming, step 3- segmentation, step 4- phoneme/grapheme relationships, and step 5- dictation. Each step has multiple activities organized hierarchically to assist implementation. It is recommended students achieve 85-90 percent mastery of each activity before moving to the next level within each step. Activities in each step of the lesson are well scaffolded for both the student and teacher. New information builds on previously taught skills with ample practice opportunities for new and old skills in each lesson. Teachers are provided with specific dialogue in each lesson to assist with instruction.



*S.P.I.R.E.* is a supplemental/intervention program designed to provide systematic instruction in the five components of reading identified by the National Reading Panel (2000): phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Classroom teachers, tutors, and specialists can use *S.P.I.R.E.* in one-on-one or small group instruction of three to five students for 50-60 minute daily lessons as the optimal instructional format. *S.P.I.R.E.* is designed for at risk or struggling first-eighth grade students who already demonstrate mastery of the letter-sound correspondences for single consonants. However, because most struggling readers have difficulties with this specific skill, as a stand alone program *S.P.I.R.E.* without *Sounds Sensible* cannot be considered a comprehensive intervention program.

The scope and sequence of *S.P.I.R.E.* begins where *Sounds Sensible* stops, with initial instruction in the short vowel sounds and their corresponding symbols in level one. It is suggested that levels one through eight of *S.P.I.R.E.* can be completed in 2 to 4 academic years, depending on the needs of individual students. Fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills are taught and practiced at each level with

fluency drills, repeated oral readings, phonetically controlled vocabulary, visualization strategies, literal and inferential questioning. Level one provides instruction in consonant digraphs, closed syllable, and the welded sounds of -ng and -nk. Level two includes the 'fls' doubling rule, the silent -e syllable type, etc. Level three introduces the open syllable type, closed syllable exceptions, three sounds of -ed, suffixes without base change, double consonant syllable division, etc. Level four introduces vowel digraphs, the consonant -le syllable type, etc. Level five introduces the sounds of 'c' and 'g,' the r-controlled syllable type, -dge, vowel combinations, etc. Level six introduces prefixes, suffixes, silent letter patterns, vowel combinations, etc. Level seven introduces v/v syllables, additional vowel combinations, additional suffixes, etc. Level eight introduces r-controlled syllables when followed by a vowel, prefixes, suffixes, additional sounds of i, ch, sh, and que. An exhaustive list of the scope and sequence can be found on the company website. Each *S.P.I.R.E.* lesson includes ten essential steps: 1. phonogram cards, 2. phonological awareness, 3. word building, 4. word decoding/sentence reading, 5. pre-reading, 6. reading, 7. sound dictation, 8. pre-spelling, 9. spelling, 10. sentence dictation.

The *Complete Teacher Set with Sounds Sensible* is the combination of *Sounds Sensible* and *S.P.I.R.E.* The combined programs will provide teachers and other professionals with the necessary tools to provide comprehensive reading instruction in all areas of phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics. The *Sounds Sensible* program ends with instruction of single consonants and the short "a" vowel. *S.P.I.R.E.* begins with a review of the short "a" vowel and continues with instruction in the rest of the short vowels and sound/symbol correspondences in addition to higher level phonics instruction, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

The *Sounds Sensible* materials come in a small kit that includes everything needed to teach each lesson. It is a separate purchase from the *S.P.I.R.E.* kit. The materials include a teacher's guide, color coordinated instructional cards and game cards, blackline masters, game mats, bingo chips, game cards, and die. Each skill is taught to mastery and progress monitoring is built into the program with frequent spiraling back to review previously taught information and linking it to new skills. The *S.P.I.R.E.* program offers an assessment instrument that may be used in *Sounds Sensible* to assist with placement.

The *S.P.I.R.E.* kit contains all materials necessary to teach lessons from levels one through eight. This includes a teacher's manual, blackline masters, a student workbook, and a student reader for each level. Phonogram cards, word cards, magnet board and letters, small letter set, magnetic phoneme segmentation chart with sound circles and syllable rectangles, and an initial placement assessment are included as program ancillaries.

The *Complete Teacher Set with Sounds Sensible* is a combination of both kits in one purchase. When the two programs are used together as *The Complete Teacher Set with Sounds Sensible*, the program is considered to be a comprehensive intervention program for kindergarten through eighth grade students.

### How are Sounds Sensible and S.P.I.R.E. aligned with Reading First?

*Sounds Sensible's* instructional design and instructional content align with the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000) and tenets of Reading First. It is explicit and systematic in its instruction of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and beginning sound/symbol correspondence (phonics). Phonological awareness is initially introduced at the sentence level then moves along the hierarchy to words, syllables

and phonemes. Each sound/symbol correspondence is explicitly taught, practiced and then reviewed during the next lesson when one more sound/symbol is introduced. *Sounds Sensible* focuses on the single consonants and short vowel "a." The sequence of introduction is logical and based on minimal pairs (sounds that are made in the mouth in the same place and manner, but differ on voicing) with the exception of digraphs. Digraphs are not introduced in the *Sounds Sensible* program; they are introduced in the *S.P.I.R.E.* program at level 1 with the remaining short vowel sounds. *Sounds Sensible* is a beginning phonics program and does not include all of the approximately 44 speech sounds and their corresponding grapheme(s). However, multiple practice opportunities are built into the program to allow for mastery of the targeted skills.

*S.P.I.R.E.*'s instructional design is similar to *Sounds Sensible* and the instructional content begins where *Sounds Sensible* stops. It aligns with the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000) and Reading First. It is explicit and systematic in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics and fluency. *S.P.I.R.E.* incorporates vocabulary and comprehension components at various points during instruction, typically after oral reading activities with teacher direction and additional practice in the student workbook. Each lesson includes five additional lesson plans reinforcing and practicing the same skill to provide multiple opportunities for students to learn to mastery.

Professional development is not offered for *Sounds Sensible* alone, but is part of the two day training workshops that are available for *S.P.I.R.E.* at the per trainee cost. The two day trainings are open-enrollment. Upon district adoption of *Sounds Sensible* and *S.P.I.R.E.*, initial staff development is provided at no additional cost. Further consultation and professional development may be negotiated following the initial training. After the initial training both the publisher and program author are available by phone or email to assist trainees with individual questions. School wide or grade level implementation is not required with either program. The teacher's manuals are written in clear, concise and detailed language to facilitate accurate implementation.

### Research Support for Sounds Sensible and S.P.I.R.E.



Although many of the principles of instruction implemented in *Sounds Sensible* and *S.P.I.R.E.* are consistent with current findings on the characteristics of effective interventions, no empirical research has been conducted on the efficacy of the program the way it is exemplified in these materials. Future studies that employ control groups and have sound experimental designs will help determine the overall effectiveness of this program.

### Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Sounds Sensible* and *S.P.I.R.E.*:

- The comprehensive kits for both programs include all materials necessary for implementation.
- Detailed language is provided for each step of each lesson to assist teachers in scaffolding instruction.
- Scope and sequence is evident and each lesson provides multiple practice opportunities of previously learned skills to attain mastery.

Weaknesses of *Sounds Sensible* and *S.P.I.R.E.*:

- The *S.P.I.R.E.* kit alone does not include the beginning skill lessons necessary to provide comprehensive reading instruction because it lacks sound/symbol correspondence instruction at the single consonant level.

### Which Florida districts have schools that implement *Sounds Sensible* and/or *S.P.I.R.E.*?

Einstein Montessori School Cocoa, FL 32926	321-631-9876
Epiphany Cathedral School Venice, FL 34285	941-488-2215
Dreams are Free Sarasota, FL 34232	941-366-4010
Dreams are Free Fort Myers, FL 33901	239-337-4010

### For More Information

<http://www.epsbooks.com/dynamic/catalog/series.asp?seriesonly=3183M>

<http://www.spire.org>

### References

National Reading Panel (2000). Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. NIH Publication No. 00-4754. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.



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Date Posted: June, 2006

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)