Evidence of Reading Simplified Efficacy

The instructional model at the center of Reading Simplified did not start as a commercial program. Its three-part lesson, its activities, and its diagnostic decision-making were developed and tested as the Targeted Reading Intervention—a federally funded research program that produced randomized controlled trials and more than a dozen peer-reviewed articles. That research comes first below.

After it comes three further kinds of evidence: independent reviewers who have evaluated Reading Simplified itself, schools and districts that have measured student results with standard assessments, and individual teachers and tutors who documented what happened with their own students. Each section is labeled for what it is.

Start here if you only read three: the TRI research base, the AIR evaluation, and Kathryn's middle school cohort.

PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH ON THE CORE INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL

The Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI; now Targeted Reading Instruction)

Beginning in 2005, Dr. Marnie Ginsberg led the development of the Targeted Reading Intervention at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the research lab of Dr. Lynne Vernon-Feagans. TRI uses the same three-part lesson structure, the same core activities, and the same diagnostic thinking that Dr. Ginsberg built into Reading Simplified lessons today.

That body of work:

- Received more than **$12 million** in federal IES funding
- Produced **more than 12 peer-reviewed journal articles** examining its efficacy

- Was tested in **multiple randomized controlled trials** of classroom teachers with K–1 struggling readers in low-income rural communities, with consistent effects
- Earned **one of the highest effect sizes listed on Evidence for ESSA**—at an average dosage of under five hours of instruction per child

SELECTED CITATIONS

Amendum, S., Vernon-Feagans, L., & Ginsberg, M. C. (2011). The effectiveness of a technologically facilitated classroom-based early reading intervention: The Targeted Reading Intervention. *Elementary School Journal, 112*(1), 107–131.

Vernon-Feagans, L., Kainz, K., Hedrick, A., Ginsberg, M., & Amendum, S. (2013). Live webcam coaching to help early elementary classroom teachers provide effective literacy instruction for struggling readers: The Targeted Reading Intervention. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 105*(4), 1175–1187. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032143

What this does and doesn't claim

The randomized trials tested TRI within the specific confines of that research, focusing on K–1 students in rural, high-poverty schools and their classroom teachers with webcam coaching. Reading Simplified is not the exact same package because it extends the model to a wider range of students and contexts. It also relies on teachers trained through online asynchronous and synchronous courses with ongoing support rather than in-person training with webcam coaching. The initial trials establish that the core instructional model, such as the lesson structure, activities, and diagnostic decision-making, accelerates struggling readers under rigorous testing. Reading Simplified provides the evidence that this model holds up when ordinary teachers implement it at scale, as documented in the sections below.

INDEPENDENT REVIEWS & DISCUSSION

AIR (American Institutes for Research) Evaluation

AIR's Center on Multi-Tiered System of Supports evaluated one year of Reading Simplified implementation (2023–24) in two Title I elementary schools serving 450+ K–2 students. Students at or above benchmark on DIBELS rose from 30% to 70% in a single year with an average effect size of d = 1.70, more than four times typical annual growth.

Read the AIR evaluation

Reading Meetings with Drs. Mark Seidenberg and Molly Farry-Thorn

At the time of this recording, Seidenberg was a cognitive scientist at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and author of *Language at the Speed of Sight*; Farry-Thorn was a post-doc in his lab. In these conversations they examine how Reading Simplified's routines align with what the science says about how the brain learns to read, in particular that readers are statistical learners who acquire patterns from exposure, not from memorized rules. In the discussion of efficiency of reading instruction, Dr. Seidenberg concluded:

> *"And this is where I really 'grok' what you're doing, as they used to say a long time ago, because you picked up on what is really essential about learning in a system where the parts are correlated with one another. And so you can learn more than one thing at a time. And that will make things more efficient for sure."*

Listen to the conversations

Pedagogy Non Grata

Pedagogy Non Grata, an independent education research organization co-founded by teacher and researcher Nathaniel Hansford, conducted its own meta-analysis of eight TRI studies as a proxy for Reading Simplified, finding a consistent, moderately positive effect (mean ES = .44).

Read Nate's review

Seaside Literacy

Seaside Literacy independently reviewed the controlled research on the predecessor of Reading Simplified, Targeted Reading Intervention, and identified six studies with control groups, most using randomized controlled designs, calling it one of the most thoroughly studied programs in its phonics-intervention comparison. After comparing Reading Simplified with programs including Wilson, UFLI, LiPS, and other speech-to-print approaches, the reviewer concluded that Reading Simplified has unusually strong evidence and unusually low instructional dosage, calling it "hands-down, the best phonics program I have ever seen" and recommending it as the first program parents and educators consider for struggling readers.

Research on Reading Simplified · Know Your Options: Phonics Interventions

The Reading League—Curriculum Evaluation (Compass)

The Reading League reviewed Reading Simplified's K–3 materials against its Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines, which inspect programs for practices that reading research has disproven. Reviewers found Reading Simplified's core instructional design aligned with the science, crediting its cumulative, interleaved practice and its highly structured, skill-specific routines. Reading Simplified is a foundational, diagnostic system designed to run alongside a comprehensive ELA curriculum, and the report is best read with that scope in mind.

Read The Reading League's report

SCHOOL-BASED RESULTS

Each of these schools measured with its own assessments, on its own timeline. Where a comparison group exists, it's noted.

Bleckley County Primary School, Georgia

After school-wide adoption of Reading Simplified in 2023–24, over 92% of Bleckley kindergartners were proficient on Acadience/DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency, while their average whole-word reading score already exceeded the end-of-first-grade benchmark. First grade grew 16+ percentage points from fall to spring, nearly triple the prior year's growth.

Watch/Read Bleckley's case study

Meeker Elementary, Colorado

In its first year implementing Reading Simplified, Meeker Elementary saw 24% schoolwide reading growth; by year two, kindergarten students moved from 12% at benchmark in fall to 82% by year's end.

Watch/Read Meeker's case study · Follow-ups

Maplewood Elementary, Colorado

After one year with Reading Simplified, 73% of kindergarteners met DIBELS benchmark, up from 52–54% in prior years, while first-grade benchmark rates rose from 37% to 59%.

Read Maplewood's case study

East Harlem, New York

Three first-grade teachers at a Community School District 4 school—serving largely English language learners and students with disabilities—adopted Reading Simplified after years of stalled results under mandated programs. In one year, one classroom reached 85% of students on grade level with four above level, students with disabilities who had made no progress the prior year moved as many as three levels, and the school expanded the approach to K–2.

Watch/Read East Harlem's case study

Chapin Elementary, South Carolina

Nearly 40 educators at Chapin Elementary signed up to implement Reading Simplified, expanding the approach across classrooms and intervention settings. Teachers reported strong student engagement and "fast accelerated progress" as they integrated Switch It, Read It, Sort It, and the Streamlined Pathway into instruction.

Watch/Read Chapin's case study

INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES

These are documented results from individual educators—not controlled studies, but detailed accounts with real assessment data, from people you can watch teach.

Kenton, Ohio—Tier 3 Student Returns to Grade Level in 6–8 Weeks

After just 6–8 weeks of Reading Simplified instruction, a first-grade Tier 3 student reached grade-level benchmarks and was ready to return to general education—an unusually rapid transition out of intensive intervention.

Read Kenton's case study

Kathryn—30 Middle School Struggling Readers Grow Nearly 4 Years in 17 Weeks

A middle school interventionist working with 30 students well below grade level. Average growth of nearly four years in 17 weeks.

Read Kathryn's case study

Jennifer—Kindergarten ELLs Reading by the Second Month, Fully Virtual

2011 Arizona ELL Teacher of the Year Jennifer Glueck opened the 2020–21 year teaching kindergarten whole-class and 100% virtually, with all but one student below benchmark on DIBELS and most scoring zero on letter names and sounds. Setting aside her curriculum's two-letters-a-week pace, she introduced Switch It on the third day of school and Read It soon after. Within eight weeks her students had mastered 28 letter-sounds including digraphs, and by the second month the class was reading simple decodable texts, with 80–90% of students reading some or all of the words.

Watch/Read Jennifer's case study

Adrienne—Dyslexic Student, Reading Simplified vs. Orton-Gillingham

A dyslexic student rose from the bottom 10th percentile to the 63rd percentile in NWEA MAP reading test scores in under 32 weeks of Reading Simplified tutoring. During an intervening month of intensive daily Orton-Gillingham tutoring, his scores showed no growth, then accelerated again when Reading Simplified resumed—an informative single-student ABA pattern, though not a controlled comparison.

Read Adrienne's case study

Melanie—OG-Trained Tutor Finds a Faster Path

Former chemical engineer and auditor Melanie Burley completed extensive Orton-Gillingham training, including an 80-hour course, but found its mastery-based scope and sequence too limiting for her 10-year-old niece. After switching to Reading Simplified, she found she could move more quickly into advanced code, multisyllable words, and challenging text without waiting for spelling mastery to catch up—what she described as the missing piece in her prior training.

Watch/Read Melanie's case study

Jennifer—From Well Below Benchmark to Benchmark in 4 Weeks

A first grader receiving high-dosage Reading Simplified tutoring moved from Well Below Benchmark to Benchmark after just 14 one-hour sessions. Her DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency rose from 5 to 32 words per minute, while accuracy increased from 36% to 89%.

Read Jennifer's case study

Colleen—First Graders Months Ahead of Typical Pace

First-grade teacher Colleen reported that after implementing Reading Simplified, her class was progressing much faster than usual: by October, students were already performing where she typically expected them to be in December or January.

Watch/Read Colleen's case study

Catherine—Middle School Reading Specialist Finds a System for 7th–8th Graders

Catherine Anderson became a reading specialist in Austin, Texas, serving 7th and 8th graders reading at kindergarten through fifth-grade levels—with no program or scope and sequence to work from. With Reading Simplified's Streamlined Pathway and activities adapted for older students, she reports the shift came within a week: students who arrived saying "I'm never gonna know how to read" began asking what they'd learn to read that day.

Watch/Read Catherine's case study

Marnie—Two Years of Reading Growth After 4 Hours of Tutoring

Marnie Ginsberg worked with a third grader initially misdiagnosed at a first-grade reading level by a Barton tutor. After just four total hours of targeted Reading Simplified instruction, the student no longer needed intervention; by the end of third grade, she was earning straight A's, reading 45 minutes nightly for pleasure, and scored at the fifth-grade level on the San Diego Quick Assessment.

Read Marnie's case study · Follow-ups

Terri—Non-Readers to Readers in 3–4 Months

Tutor Terri Jenson used Reading Simplified with struggling first graders who already had phonics instruction but could not apply it effectively. One student progressed from reading only a few CVC words to independently reading Magic Tree House books in about four months; another gained a full year in reading in 3½ months.

Read Terri's case study

Andrea—From Unable to Blend CVC Words to Reading in Weeks

Tutor Andrea began with a kindergartener who knew only a few letter sounds and could not blend CVC words. Meeting just once a week, with some family practice between sessions, the student began reading within several weeks. Andrea, an experienced Orton-Gillingham-trained tutor, said she had never seen this kind of progress this quickly with OG, even though the student showed possible signs of dyslexia.

Read Andrea's case study

Evangeline—Weekly Lesson Prep Cut to 26 Minutes

First-grade teacher Evangeline reported cutting down her 60–70 hour workweeks and realized she just spent 26 minutes of planning for an entire week of centers and small-group reading, while also seeing unusually high student engagement.

Read Evangeline's case study

Kind Words from Several Teachers

Watch/Read the teachers and parents' experiences