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# Introduction to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Reading First (RF)

*With the Practitioner's Voice of Kimberly J. Kolba*

*Mr. Adams is a third-grade teacher who enjoys reading to students. Susan and Jane are two students who enjoy sharing time together reading a book during paired-reading time. During paired-reading time, Mr. Adams makes sure all students are working with a partner, so no one child feels alone. Robert came to Mr. Adams and thanked him for being his teacher. Here is what Robert said during that conversation:*

*Robert: Mr. Adams, I would like to thank you for making sure I have a partner during paired-reading time. When I was in second grade, I felt alone. It seemed that other children who were better at reading were happier because they could read. Now that I'm here I'm getting better at reading, and you make it easier for me.*

*Mr. Adams: Robert, thank you for telling me this. You are a very good student, and I can see all the good things you do during reading. I will continue to help you find new information in books that will help you become a better reader.*

*Mr. Adams thought to himself, "I am so glad that I implemented the components of No Child Left Behind and Reading First described in Reading First and Beyond. It's working."*

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**T**he purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, we want to provide information about the important areas of No Child Left Behind and Reading First legislation and the curriculum components described in these laws that have been demonstrated to significantly increase students' literary abilities. Second, we will describe the purpose of special features that appear in every chapter of this book. These features were designed to help you expand your knowledge about critical literacy instructional domains. We want to assist you in implementing and moving beyond Reading First legislation so you can enrich all children's literacy.

Within the last decades, literacy has become the focal point for educational legislation. There are two major reasons for policy makers and government officials to have built and supported NCLB and Reading First. First, reading proficiency is the most fundamental skill critical to most, if not all, academic learning and success in school. No doubt, mathematics, social studies, science, and other content domains are essential for academic and intellectual development, but to learn information in these disciplines in school, students must know how to read. Moreover, in the United States, the ability to read proficiently is significantly related to how much a person can achieve in his or her personal and professional life (Lyon, 2002; Shaywitz, 1999). Second, the number of children in the United States who cannot read proficiently is unacceptable. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics recently published the 2003 *Reading Report Card* as part of the *Nation's Report Card* (NCES, 2003). This snapshot was a summary of reading abilities of fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade students as documented by the *National Assessment of Educational Progress*. It reported a persistent trend. In the fourth grade, 37 percent of students read below the basic level nationally, which essentially renders them illiterate. Only 31 percent of fourth graders can read proficiently at this grade level or above it. These percentages must change given the evidence that most children can learn to read when provided with sufficient instruction from excellent teachers (Block, 2004; Block, Oakar, & Hirt, 2002). NCLB and Reading First legislation were written to guide us to help all children become highly literate. How this national law does so, as well as how it can be actualized in all kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms, will be described next.

### **PART I: WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE LEGISLATION**

In the following paragraphs, we will define NCLB and Reading First and provide background information about how Reading First legislation began and is continuing to shape literacy instruction in America.

No Child Left Behind is the historic, bipartisan education reform effort that President Bush proposed his first week in office and that was passed into law on January 8, 2002. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. NCLB is built on four principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater

local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research, as described in more detail at [www.ed.gov/print/programs/readingfirst/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/print/programs/readingfirst/index.html). The No Child Left Behind Act also established Reading First as a new, high-quality evidence-based literacy policy and national program to provide excellent literacy instruction to all primary-aged students in America.

The Reading First initiative builds on the findings of many years of scientific research, which, at the request of Congress, were compiled by the National Reading Panel (NRP) in a report presented to this body in the fall of 2000 (NICHD, 2000a) and into a research synthesis commissioned by the National Academy of Sciences (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

These projects were the most rigorous and comprehensive review of reading research relevant to teaching reading ever undertaken, and they provided clear and unequivocal evidence that the majority of children could learn to read if teachers were provided the necessary training to implement scientifically validated effective instruction. NRP analyzed research in the categories of: alphabets (phonemic awareness and phonics), fluency, comprehension, teacher education, technology, and methodology (NICHD, 2000b). Results of this research are presented in this book.

Copies of the full NRP report have been sent to every school district in America, and the distribution continues through the National Institute for Literacy, the U.S. Department of Education, and the NICHD. The significance of this report cannot be overemphasized. The results of both the National Academy of Sciences report and the National Reading Panel report made it clear that a comprehensive, scientifically based approach to reading instruction is necessary if all children are to learn to read efficiently and effectively. Based on these findings, the essential components of all reading programs must include systematic and direct instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension strategies.

In the next few paragraphs, we will address the instructional, assessment, and teacher professional development requirements of NCLB, early literacy instruction (Early Reading First initiative for preschool-aged children), and Reading First (kindergarten through Grade 3 students). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that:

- All states must assess students' literacy and mathematic abilities in Grades 3–8, and once during Grades 10–12, by 2006, and they are to use state-designed tests.
- All teachers of core academic subjects must be judged as highly qualified and certified to teach the subject areas to which they have been assigned according to state-established certifications, which must be in place by 2006.
- All students must be assessed in science once during Grades 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12, by 2008, using state-designed tests.
- Public school choice and supplemental educational services must be provided to students in schools that have been unable to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years.
- 100 percent student literacy and mathematical proficiency must be attained by all students by June of 2014.

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Nothing is more important to a child's education at school than having a well-prepared teacher. That's why NCLB requires that states make sure there is a highly qualified teacher in every public school classroom by the end of the 2005–2006 school year. To be highly qualified under NCLB, a teacher must

- Have a bachelor's degree
- Be fully certified as defined by the state department of education
- Be able to demonstrate subject area competence in any core subject taught

### **Resources You Can Use to Implement NCLB**

*No Child Left Behind: A Toolkit for Teachers* is a booklet that “. . . was written with teachers in mind. This booklet contains important information focusing on the teacher quality provisions and how the law supports teachers” (www.ed.gov/teachers, 2004). At this location you can also find descriptions of educators who have significantly raised student achievement and have successfully closed the achievement gap. The U.S. Department of Education is focusing attention on exemplary classroom teachers who are successful in raising student academic achievement for all of their students—often through the use of innovative classroom strategies. These teachers will be recognized as American Stars of Teaching and will be highlighted as representatives of the thousands of teachers who, regardless of the challenges they face, are making a difference in the lives of their students.

American Stars of Teaching have been identified in each state and the District of Columbia, and they represent all grade levels and disciplines. Officials from the U.S. Department of Education will be visiting the classes of all American Stars of Teaching to congratulate them on their success as a part of the Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative. This initiative, also described on this Web site, includes teacher and principal roundtables, summer and fall teacher workshops, a Research-to-Practice Teacher Summit that was held in July 2004, toolkits for teachers, resource materials, the weekly e-mail update “Teacher E-Bytes,” and a free-of-charge online professional development program.

The workshop presentations and materials from the U.S. Department of Education Teacher-to-Teacher Workshops were developed by various individuals and are being provided as illustrative examples of what might be useful to teachers. The Department is not requiring or encouraging the use of any particular methods or materials in the classroom, and the use of the methods and materials in these sessions does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education.

Where can you obtain additional lesson plans, teacher resources, and information on NCLB when you complete this book? The Department of Education sponsors a Web site, www.NCLB.gov. You can download exemplary, research-based lesson plans. There are many other publications as well as free materials for parents.

### **Research That Teachers Can Use to Implement Reading First Legislation**

The development and implementation of the Reading First (RF) initiative was built on the continued recognition that many of our nation's children,

particularly those from disadvantaged environments, struggle to read and read below their grade-level placements. RF is also founded on the continuing convergence of scientific evidence as to how reading develops, reading difficulties arise, and effective instruction occurs. It recognizes the need to increase reading instructional programs and professional development courses that are based on scientific research, and it requires all states to set high standards of achievement as well as to create a system of accountability to measure results. RF provides flexibility to states and local districts in meeting their specific students' needs.

In order to achieve these goals, the Reading First initiative significantly increased the federal investment in scientifically based reading research (SBRR) instruction in the early grades. Approximately one billion dollars per year for a six-year period was provided to states for school districts to implement instructional programs based on SBRR. This substantial funding increase was also predicated on data indicating that investment in high-quality reading instruction at the preschool (Early Reading First) and kindergarten through Grade 3 levels (Reading First) would help to reduce the number of children who would need special education services later because of reading failure. But it was clear that any increase in funding for reading programs would result in increased student achievement if, and only if, the U.S. Department of Education developed and put in place programmatic policies and procedures to ensure successful implementation. The probability of children benefiting from the Reading First (and Early Reading First) programs is significantly increased by the following policies:

- *Strong Statute.* The Reading First grant program states clearly that all program activities must be based on scientifically based reading research. It also requires the submission of detailed state plans and annual performance reports and explicitly allows for the discontinuance of state funding when significant progress in reducing the number of students reading below grade level is not made.
- *Significant National Activities Funds.* Reading First is allotted up to \$25 million each year to allow the Department of Education to provide unprecedented funds for technical assistance and monitoring activities to support the implementation of Reading First. A specific, focused multimillion-dollar contract will provide onsite monitoring in *each state each year*.
- *Rigorous Application Process.* The rigorous Reading First process requires each state to create a detailed blueprint of its Reading First plan. States have not been allowed to provide vague overviews of any facet of their plans. As a result, monitors can assess how states are implementing their plans.
- *Performance Reporting.* States submit annual performance reports documenting their progress in reducing the number of students reading below grade level. States describe how they will make funding decisions, including discontinuation.
- *External Review.* External independent reviewers will determine the degree to which states and local school districts are increasing the number of students who read proficiently. The external reviewers also evaluate whether all components of Reading First are being taught consistently with appropriate fidelity.

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- *Improving on REA.* For all of these reasons, the implementation of Reading First will be stronger and more focused than preceding programs such as the Reading Education for All Act (REA), the former reading law that was passed under President William Clinton's administration. Unlike previous programs, Reading First enables all students and teachers in all classrooms to participate. All states have resources to use research-based methods of instruction, as described in this book, to improve student achievement. A major difference between RF and REA is that all states and local districts are held accountable for ensuring that federal funds are explicitly tied to student reading achievement and not spent in ways that do not directly touch children's literacy needs.

### **Assessing Learning in Reading First Legislation**

NCLB and RF require statewide assessments, a statewide and district-level system of accountability, and support for individual school-level literacy improvement plans based on these evaluations. The U.S. Department of Education and NCLB require the following evaluative actions:

#### *State Assessments (condensed from [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov))*

- By 2005–2006, states must have developed and implemented annual assessments in reading and mathematics in Grades 3–8, and at least once in Grades 10–12. By 2007–2008, states must administer annual science assessments at least once in Grades 3–5, Grades 6–9, and Grades 10–12.
- State assessments must be aligned with challenging academic content standards and challenging academic achievement standards. State standards must have the same expectations for all children and have at least three age-specific, achievement-level standards.
- State assessments must involve all students, including students with disabilities or limited English proficiency. State assessments must provide adequate accommodations for students with disabilities or limited English proficiency.
- States must ensure that districts administer tests of English proficiency—that measure oral language, reading, and writing skills in English—to all limited English-proficient students.
- State assessments must produce results disaggregated by gender, as well as by (1) major racial and ethnic groups within the student population, (2) English proficiency, (3) migrant status, (4) disability rankings, and (5) economic status of students. The assessment system must produce an interpretive, descriptive, and diagnostic report for each population subgroup, such as all data relative to a single ethnic group must be reported for that ethnic group separately from other ethnic group reports. States must report itemized score analyses to districts and schools.
- States must make results of state assessments administered in one school year available to school districts by the beginning of the next school year in a clear and understandable format.

- States must participate in biennial National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments in reading and mathematics for fourth and eighth graders, which began in 2002–2003, and data is examined by policy makers.
- NCLB requires states to produce annual report cards that address how *all* students are progressing in addition to information disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, English proficiency, migrant status, disability status, and low-income status. (Additional information concerning assessment can be found at [www.nclb.gov](http://www.nclb.gov) or [www.ed.gov/admins](http://www.ed.gov/admins), as these Web sites are continuously updated by the Department of Education to reflect the latest adaptations and conditions affecting NCLB.)
- According to [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov), the report cards must show two-year trend data for each subject and grade tested, with a comparison between annual objectives and actual performance for each student group. The report cards must show the percentage of each group of students not tested, graduation rates for secondary school students, and information on student achievement for the district and each school. Also, these report cards must identify schools in need of improvement
- NCLB asks educators to keep parents involved in their student's progress. Districts are required to notify parents of school choice and supplemental educational service options.
- NCLB allows parents the right to request information about their children's teachers' professional qualifications.

### **Addressing Learners With Special Needs**

In the following paragraphs, we explain how NCLB affects students with special needs.

#### *Learners Who Struggle*

Both NCLB and IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) require students with disabilities to be assessed by the state accountability system described previously. According to the U.S. Department of Education, IDEA requires that the local educational agency develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each child with a disability. This document includes information concerning how the child will be assessed and what kind of educational, developmental, and behavioral support the child will receive. Applicable accommodations to the regular assessment such as extra time, larger print, a quiet room, Braille, repeated instructions, or additional breaks may be made for students with disabilities. In Chapters 2–11, we will present methods by which students with learning disabilities can have their special learning needs met through research-based instructional practices.

#### *Learners Who Are Learning English*

NCLB and RF require students who have limited English proficiency (LEP) to be assessed and tested in reading, language arts, and math. NCLB and RF allow these students to be tested in their native language for up to three years, after which time they should be tested in English. In addition, the U.S. Department of

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Education also recently clarified that newly arrived LEP students, during their first year in the United States, will be allowed to take either the English proficiency assessments or the state literacy test. States are allowed to include limited English proficient students in a school's LEP subgroup for adequate yearly progress (AYP) purposes for up to two years after these students attain English proficiency.

States are held accountable for teaching LEP students English under NCLB and RF, and they are required to develop annual measurable achievement objectives to monitor the progress of LEP students' abilities to read English. Grant recipients failing to meet their annual measurable achievement objectives for two years are required to inform the parents of LEP students of the program's inability to meet such objectives. The state requires modification of such schools' particular curriculum, program, or method of instruction if achievement objectives are not met after four years. The state will also determine if the insufficient program will still receive funding and will require educational program personnel to be replaced.

In reference to bilingual education, the previous competitive grant program required that not less than 75 percent of funds be used for programs that use a child's native language in instruction. This requirement was repealed by NCLB. States can choose the most preferred method for teaching LEP students, including bilingual education.

Parents of LEP students do have options under NCLB. It requires local education agencies (LEAs) to provide parental notification explaining why a child may need placement in a language instruction educational program. Parents also have the right to choose which instructional program they prefer for their child. LEAs are encouraged to keep parents involved and informed of their child's participation in that personally selected program.

### *Learners Who Excel*

In this section, we will describe the special needs of gifted learners. Although RF is not designed for gifted learners (because it only requires minimum competency), this section will describe how educators can use RF research-based practices to assist gifted learners to attain highest levels of competence.

Gifted preschool and elementary school children have limited federal legislative acts designed to meet their learning needs. Only 37 states have some type of state-level mandate to provide special services to gifted readers. Only 26 states have laws that provide one or more of the following mandates on behalf of gifted readers: requirement to identify gifted readers, programmatic guidelines to build special advanced reading programs, and certifications for teachers to direct these gifted students' literacy curriculum. Many states employ regional coordinators for education of gifted children. A list of these coordinators, as well as the addresses for state-based educational advocacy and professional organizations that support gifted readers, can be found at <http://ericec.org> (click on Fact Sheets, then on State Resources for Gifted Education). The International Reading Association (IRA) has a special-interest group for gifted and talented readers, in which most recent research-based literacy practices are provided to members through newsletters. If you wish

to join this group, the charge is minimal. Contact the president of this group at [c.block@tcu.edu](mailto:c.block@tcu.edu).

## PART II: HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

In the chapters of this book, you will learn how you can use research-based instructional practices to improve all students' oral language (Chapter 2), phonological awareness (Chapter 3), understanding of phonics (Chapter 4), vocabulary (Chapter 5), fluency (Chapter 6), comprehension (Chapter 7), independent reading abilities (Chapter 8), writing (Chapter 9), and metacognition (Chapter 10), and you will learn to include parents as serious partners in helping their children learn to read (Chapter 11). You will read about scientifically validated lessons, assessment instruments, and special strategies for special literacy needs.

While the book is organized around the elements of Reading First and other research-supported instructional components for student success, we include in Table 1.1 a grid that also shows the connection between the book's content and specific IRA standards.

If you are a kindergarten or Grade 1 teacher reading this book, we recommend that you start from the beginning of the book and read each chapter in order so that you can use the information from the first few chapters at the beginning of the year and the chapters near the end of the book at the end of the year. If you are a teacher teaching in Grade 2 or 3, we recommend that you start with the chapter that most matches the curriculum objectives that you have for the beginning school year; then as you move to new curriculum objectives you may add the innovative ideas and research-based practices from the other chapters that match your exact instructional objective.

If you are a literacy coach, we recommend that you use this book either as a book study for teachers who you are coaching or as a source for demonstration lessons in individual classrooms. As a literacy coach, you may also enjoy holding faculty meetings in which you pass out one reproducible form and do a think-aloud about how all teachers at that meeting could use that particular think-aloud, form, and/or lesson to meet a specific need that they face. A think-aloud is a strategy that provides students with an opportunity to verbalize their thoughts aloud.

In every chapter you will find the following:

- *Vignette of a Child's Thoughts.* At the beginning of each chapter, this feature provides an illustration of how a component of RF legislation was applied successfully in a learning situation.
- *What Teachers Need to Know.* Throughout the book, this section is designed to present a working definition of the key literacy element described in that chapter. In every chapter, this section will provide background knowledge about a component of Reading First legislation or another scientifically validated practice in exemplary preschool-to-Grade-3 literacy programs (such as oral language, metacognition, and writing instruction).

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**Table 1.1** A Summary of IRA's *Standards for Reading Professionals—Revised 2003* and a Correlation of Where Those Standards Are Discussed In This Book

<i>IRA Standard 1: Functional Knowledge</i>	<i>Chapters</i>
<b>Element 1.1.</b> Knowledge of psychological and linguistic foundations of reading and writing processes and instruction	2, 3, 4
<b>Element 1.2.</b> Knowledge of reading research and histories of reading	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
<b>Element 1.3.</b> Knowledge of language development and reading acquisition and the variations related to cultural and linguistic diversity	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
<i>IRA Standard 2: Instructional Strategies and Curriculum Materials</i>	<i>Chapters</i>
<b>Element 2.1.</b> Use instructional grouping options as appropriate for accomplishing given purposes	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
<b>Element 2.2.</b> Use a wide range of instructional practices, approaches, and methods, including technology-based practices for learners at differing stages of development and from differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
<b>Element 2.3.</b> Use a wide range of curriculum materials in effective reading instruction for learners at different stages of reading and writing development and from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
<i>IRA Standard 3: Assessment, Diagnosis, and Evaluation</i>	<i>Chapters</i>
<b>Element 3.1.</b> Use a wide range of assessment tools and practices that range from individual and group standardized tests to individual and group informal classroom assessment strategies, including technology-based assessment tools	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
<b>Element 3.2.</b> Place students along a developmental continuum and identify students' proficiencies and difficulties	2, 3, 4
<b>Element 3.3.</b> Use assessment information to plan, evaluate, and revise effective instruction that meets the needs of all students including those at different developmental stages and those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
<i>IRA Standard 4: Creating a Literate Environment</i>	<i>Chapters</i>
<b>Element 4.1.</b> Use students' interests, reading abilities, and backgrounds as foundations for the reading and writing program	6, 9, 11
<b>Element 4.2.</b> Use a large supply of books, technology-based information, and nonprint materials representing multiple levels, broad interests, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds	2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10
<b>Element 4.3.</b> Model reading and writing enthusiastically as valued lifelong readers	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
<i>IRA Standard 5: Professional Development</i>	<i>Chapters</i>
<b>Element 5.1.</b> Display dispositions related to reading and the teaching of reading	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11
<b>Element 5.2.</b> Continue to pursue the development of professional knowledge and dispositions	1, 11
<b>Element 5.3.</b> Work with colleagues to observe, evaluate, and provide feedback on each other's practice	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
<b>Element 5.4.</b> Participate in, initiate, implement, and evaluate professional development programs	1, 11

- *Research That Teachers Can Use.* This section provides important research-based evidence that you and other educators can rely upon as you implement Reading First.
- *New Classroom-Proven, Research-Based Practices.* In this section, we present several scientifically validated instructional practices that will address the goal of the literacy domain discussed in a chapter. You can use these strategies to help children achieve success in that content domain. These practices will include a teachers' aid in many cases, such as a new graphic that has proven to be highly effective for early literacy success.
- *Tests to Assess Learning.* In this section, we will provide concrete methods that you can use to evaluate your students' progress.
- *Addressing Learners With Special Needs.* In this section, we will describe how to adapt learning and assessment techniques to meet the special students' learning needs. The needs addressed will be learning difficulties, language learning needs, and advanced literacy abilities.

## SUMMARY

During these past three decades, the failure of our nation's children to read proficiently has continued to be a consistent and persistent finding. The research supported and conducted by the NICHD and other federal agencies has led to the identification of instructional and assessment strategies that can assist children to overcome reading failure. By continuously diagnosing and assessing their progress, in ways described throughout this book, high levels of literacy success can be attained. Scientific evidence has taught us that reading must be taught—directly and systematically—and that children most at risk require the most instruction with the best-prepared teachers. The guidelines within NCLB and RF were described in this chapter.

Through the activities described in the remainder of this book, reaching literacy proficiency for all is an achievable and realistic goal. By using instruction that is based on scientific research, we can view successful reading instruction with optimism for today's and tomorrow's students. At the same time, teachers can reflect on how they can individualize their instruction to match the needs of each child. This book was written to enable you and all your colleagues to walk with confidence upon the stones of scientifically validated practices that lie herein, while your work is guided by your highest aspirations for all your students as, together, you help them reach their star-filled potentials.