National-Louis University’s Reading Recovery Program Wins $2.5 Million Innovation Grant

NLU has received a $2.5 million innovation grant through the U.S. Department of Education to expand Reading Recovery, an early literacy intervention education initiative based in the university’s National College of Education.

The grant is part of a $45.5 million award from the U.S. Department of Education to fund the “Reading Recovery: Scaling Up What Works” project in collaboration with 15 institutions of higher education lead by the Ohio State University. NLU is the only Illinois institution to receive this funding to be disseminated to qualifying school districts over the next five years.

NLU College of Education Dean Alison Hilsabeck and Dr. Mary Ann Poparad, director of the Reading Recovery Center for Literacy in the College of Education, said the funding will allow the university to expand the successful program to some of the lowest performing schools.

The goal of Reading Recovery is to reduce the number of first graders who are struggling in reading and to reduce the cost of these learners to the educational system. "We're taking a literacy intervention that has proven to be effective, and doubling the number of students it serves in Illinois and across the nation,” Poparad explains. “Through our partnership other universities, we'll be reaching out to students at some of the neediest schools across the U.S. “

Poparad adds, “National data is collected annually on every child who participates in Reading Recovery instruction. A 25-year record of success supported by research convinced the U.S. Department of Education that Reading Recovery should be scaled up so that the lowest achieving children can achieve literacy competency skills early and before they have a chance to fall behind their age mates.”

Currently, Illinois has 22 Reading Recovery teacher leaders who are certified to train Reading Recovery teachers in local regions throughout the state. In 2009-2010, 631 Reading Recovery teachers in 131 school districts provided one-to-one intervention to nearly 5,000 first graders, plus small group intervention to an additional 24,546 struggling readers in first to sixth grades. The new funding will add one new Reading Recovery teacher leader and 250 new Reading Recovery teachers during a five-year grant period, 2010-2015.

Reading Recovery, as a Response to Intervention approach, trains reading instructors how to individualize a series of 30-minute lessons that supplement the first grade core curriculum.

Research by NLU and nationwide indicates that approximately 75 percent of students who complete the program meet grade-level expectations in reading and writing. Follow-up studies indicate that most Reading Recovery students also do well on standardized tests and maintain their gains in later years.
“The research on early intervention is clear,” Dr. Linda Dorn, University of Arkansas at Little Rock said. “It is much easier-and more cost effective—to prevent reading failure than to deal with the consequences of illiteracy. A first grader who works one-on-one with a Reading Recovery teacher for 30-minute lessons over a 12 to 20-week period can catch up with peers and save a lifetime of learning problems.”

NLU is one of 22 university-based Reading Recovery centers in the U.S. that brings in teacher leaders for training, but the teacher training and continuing professional development occurs in the schools. Teachers study together in a clinical setting with teacher leaders where they learn with and from each other. They observe colleagues teaching behind a one-way mirror and discuss ways to customize instructional practices for individual learners.

“It is the ultimate professional learning community and a premier training model. If Reading Recovery were implemented in all Illinois schools, it could change the trajectory of progress for many children in our state,” said Poparad.

Over a five-year period, partner institutions will target 1,500 under-performing schools by training new teacher leaders who in turn will join with current teacher leaders to train 3,750 new Reading Recovery teachers.

In addition to NLU and Ohio State University, partner institutions include Clemson University, Georgia State University, Lesley University, National Louis University, New York University, Oakland University, Texas Women’s University, University of Connecticut, University of Kentucky, University of Maine, University of Northern Iowa, University of South Dakota, and University of Pennsylvania.

U. S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said about the i3 grant, “All across America, innovative entrepreneurs are finding solutions to our most pressing educational challenges. i3 will support creative thinkers who test good ideas and take proven approaches to scale so that more children can benefit.”

For further information about Reading Recovery in Illinois, see www.readingrecovery.org or contact Mary Ann Poparad at 630.874.4120 or at mary.poparad@nl.edu.

About NLU

National-Louis University has been a force for change in American education since its founding in 1886. Known for nearly a century as the National College of Education, it is still nationally renowned today not only for its programs in teacher preparation and educational leadership, but as one of the first universities to address the unique needs of adult learners. NLU pioneered accelerated education for adults, and today offers a range of undergraduate and graduate degree programs in the National College of Education, the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Management and Business. NLU has a flagship urban campus at 122 South Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago; campuses in Lisle, Skokie, Wheeling and Elgin, Ill.; as well as Beloit and Milwaukee, Wis.; Tampa, Fla. and Nowy Sacz, Poland.