Start Making a Reader Today® (SMART)

Why Is This Strategy Useful?

Start Making a Reader Today® (SMART) is a volunteer tutoring program in Oregon to help kindergarten through second-grade students learn to read. It specifically focuses on those children who are having difficulty learning the basics of reading. Research indicates that the earlier the intervention, the better chance a child has for success. Thus, the SMART program's goal is to aid kindergarten through second-grade students in learning to read, so that by the third grade, students are able to read to learn. Also, considerable research indicates that one-on-one tutoring in which teachers and other paid professionals serve as tutors produces more substantial gains than any other combination, including tutoring by peers or parents.

Description of Strategy

SMART is a tutoring program conceived and developed in 1992 by former Oregon Governor Neil Goldschmidt. This program focuses on kindergarten to second-grade students who have not yet learned to read. SMART differs from other programs in its approach to volunteer training and its minimal demands on teachers. The SMART coordinators recruit and train community volunteers to read once a week from October to May with two children. Volunteer training is brief and focuses as much on the logistics of tutoring as it does on reading instruction techniques. Following training, the volunteers' task is to read one-on-one with two elementary age children in need of literacy support and to encourage a love of reading books. The consistent, one-on-one relationship gives children the attention, self-confidence, and skills to succeed in school and beyond.

Research Evidence

The evidence base includes at least one quasi-experimental study, which evaluated the effects on reading achievement of a low-cost, widely implemented volunteer reading program. The study included 84 beginning first- grade students, at risk of reading difficulties. Analyses revealed that students in the experimental group made greater growth on a word-identification measure than students in the comparison condition; the experimental group also made more growth than a group of average-achieving students who were from the same classrooms as the students in the experimental and comparison groups. In addition, students in the experimental group scored higher than students in the comparison condition on measures of reading fluency and word comprehension at the end of second grade.

Sample Studies Supporting This Strategy

Baker, S., Gersten, R., & Keating, T. (2000). When less may be more: A 2-year longitudinal evaluation of a volunteer tutoring program requiring minimal training. *Reading Research Quarterly, 35*(4), 494–519.

This study evaluated the effects on reading achievement of a low-cost, widely implemented volunteer reading program that has been expanding rapidly throughout the state of Oregon. Eighty-four beginning 1st grade students, at risk of reading difficulties were randomly assigned to experimental and comparison groups. Adult volunteers tutored students in the experimental group in 30-minute sessions 2 times per week in 1st and 2nd grade. At the end of grades 1 and

2, students were administered a number of standardized reading measures, including measures of individual word reading, reading comprehension, word comprehension, and reading fluency. Analyses revealed that students in the experimental group made greater growth on a word identification measure than students in the comparison condition; they also made more growth than a group of average-achieving students who were from the same classrooms as the students in the experimental and comparison groups. Students in the experimental group also scored higher than students in the comparison condition on measures of reading fluency and word comprehension at the end of second grade. The rapid letter naming, word identification, and reading fluency tests are appended.

Additional Resources

SMART—Start Making a Reader Today[®]. http://www.getsmartoregon.org