



International Reading Association

A membership organization of literacy professionals

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Summary of the Striving Readers Initiative

To combat reading deficiencies among older students, President George W. Bush has proposed the Striving Readers initiative. The goals of the program are to raise student achievement in middle and high schools by improving the literacy skills of struggling adolescent readers, and to help build a strong, scientific, research base around specific strategies that improve adolescent literacy skills.

The Striving Readers program will make competitive grants to develop, implement, evaluate, and bring to scale research-based reading interventions for middle or high-school students. The program will prioritize services to Title I-eligible schools that are at risk of not meeting annual yearly progress requirements under NCLB or that have significant percentages or numbers of students reading below grade level.

Striving Readers programs will include three key components: (1) research-based literacy interventions, targeted to students who are reading significantly below grade level, including specific strategies to accelerate the development of literacy skills and to monitor student progress; (2) classroom-based strategies for improving student literacy that may include professional development for subject matter teachers and training in the use of research-based reading and comprehension strategies across subject areas; and (3) a rigorous experimental evaluation component.

Currently, the program is funded at \$24.8 million. The Department of Education estimates that the application for Striving Reader grants will be available during summer 2005, with awards made in fall 2005. Due to the small amount of funds available, this will probably not be a large-scale project. Rather, it will be a demonstration program with a small number of large grants in order to build a research base. The President's fiscal 2006 budget asks Congress to expand his Striving Readers initiative to \$200 million.

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) will design and conduct an evaluation that will drive the number of grants and timing of awards. IES is working to create a competitive preference system whereby schools would receive priority for awards by agreeing to participate in randomized research studies. One potential system would fund schools in pairs; in this system, one school would receive a new program immediately and the other would receive it a year later, thereby creating conditions conducive to randomized controlled studies. The grants will likely be structured so that reading researchers, in partnership with local districts having multiple school sites in small learning communities, can scale up or adopt a program. The RFPs have not been developed yet.

IRA has been meeting regularly with the U.S. Department of Education, education associations, and members of Congress to affect policy and promote the critical importance of reading specialists and expert literacy coaches in all adolescent literacy initiatives.

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