

Guidance for the Reading First Program



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A. PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM

A-1. What is the purpose of the Reading First Program?

The purpose of Reading First is to ensure that all children in America learn to read well by the end of third grade.

Teaching young children to read is the most critical educational priority facing this country. Encouragingly, this is an area where some of the best and most rigorous scientifically based research is available. The Reading First program will help States and districts apply this research - and the proven instructional and assessment tools consistent with the research - to teach all children to read. By teaching all children to read well by the end of third grade, we will ensure that all students advance to later grades well prepared to achieve their full academic potential.

The Reading First program will provide the necessary assistance to States and districts to establish research-based reading programs for students in kindergarten through third grade (See Question C-1 for more information on instructional programs). Reading First funds will also focus on providing significantly increased teacher professional development to ensure that all teachers, including special education teachers, have the skills they need to teach these programs effectively. Additionally, the program provides assistance to States and districts in preparing classroom teachers to effectively screen, identify and overcome reading barriers facing their students.

Quite simply, Reading First focuses on what works, and will support proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms. The program provides assistance to States and districts in selecting or developing effective instructional materials, programs, learning systems and strategies to implement methods that have been proven to teach reading. Reading First also provides assistance for the selection and administration of screening, diagnostic and classroom-based instructional reading assessments with proven validity and reliability, in order to measure where students are and monitor their progress.

Taken together, the complementary research-based programs, practices and tools required by Reading First will give teachers across the nation the skills and support they need to teach all children to read fluently by the end of third grade.

A-2. What is the difference between Reading First and previous Federal reading initiatives?

Reading First is the largest – and yet most focused – early reading initiative this country has ever undertaken. Reading First provides an opportunity for every State to implement reading programs that help all students achieve reading

mastery by the end of third grade. The Reading First program, by design, specifically supports States as they work with their districts to ensure that teachers learn about instruction and other activities based on scientifically based reading research, implement programs that are based on this research, and use rigorous assessments with proven validity and reliability that effectively screen, diagnose and monitor the progress of all students.

In addition to the much larger scope and level of ongoing support provided by Reading First, this program focuses directly on ensuring that every child can read at grade level or above by the end of third grade. Reading First will provide support to all K-3 students and their teachers in the schools that are served, and it is the Department's view that the classroom provides the most important teaching venue for reaching these early readers. It is in the classroom where the program will build and support the scientifically based reading foundation. Reading First seeks to embed the essential components of reading instruction into all elements of the primary, mainstream K-3 teaching structures of each State.

Scientifically based reading research has identified five essential components of reading instruction (See Question B-1). This research demonstrates that children need to master skills in these five interrelated areas in order to become proficient, successful readers. Reading First focuses instructional methods and materials, assessments and professional development on these key areas. Programs funded under Reading First will have to demonstrate their ability to address these components in a comprehensive and effective manner.

A-3. Which part of the No Child Left Behind legislation authorizes Reading First?

Title I, Part B, Subpart 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 authorizes Reading First. Reading First is the academic cornerstone of No Child Left Behind, which recognizes the importance of both improving student reading achievement and implementing programs and strategies scientifically proven to be effective. Reading First, along with the programs authorized under Title I, focuses on improving student achievement for all students, especially children in the nation's most disadvantaged schools and communities.

Title I, Part B, Subpart 1 delineates how the program will operate. The Department may issue regulations for this program and will inform States of any proposed regulations.

B. COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE READING PROGRAMS

B-1. What are the essential components of reading instruction?

Scientifically based reading research has identified five essential components of effective reading instruction. To ensure that children learn to read well, explicit and systematic instruction must be provided in these five areas:

1. **Phonemic Awareness** – The ability to hear, identify and manipulate the individual sounds – phonemes – in spoken words. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that the sounds of spoken language work together to make words.
2. **Phonics** – The understanding that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes – the sounds of spoken language – and graphemes – the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language. Readers use these relationships to recognize familiar words accurately and automatically and to decode unfamiliar words.
3. **Vocabulary Development** – Development of stored information about the meanings and pronunciation of words necessary for communication. There are four types of vocabulary:
 - Listening vocabulary – the words needed to understand what is heard
 - Speaking vocabulary – the words used when speaking
 - Reading vocabulary – the words needed to understand what is read
 - Writing vocabulary – the words used in writing
4. **Reading fluency, including oral reading skills** – Fluency is the ability to read text accurately and quickly. It provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Fluent readers recognize words and comprehend at the same time.
5. **Reading comprehension strategies** – Strategies for understanding, remembering, and communicating with others about what has been read. Comprehension strategies are sets of steps that purposeful, active readers use to make sense of text.

Appendix B summarizes the key findings from scientifically based research on the essential components of reading instruction.

B-2. What is scientifically based reading research?

Scientifically based reading research is research that applies rigorous, systematic and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading

development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties. This includes research that:

1. Employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
2. Involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;
3. Relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations; and
4. Has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective and scientific review.

B-3. What evidence is critical in evaluating scientifically based reading research?

When reviewing research findings to determine whether they meet the criteria for scientifically based reading research, State educational agencies, local educational agencies, and schools should consider the extent to which the research meets each of the criteria. Questions for consideration about each criterion include:

1. **Use of rigorous, systematic and empirical methods** – Does the work have a solid theoretical or research foundation? Was it carefully designed to avoid biased findings and unwarranted claims of effectiveness? Does the research clearly delineate how it was conducted, by whom it was conducted, and on whom it was conducted?
2. **Adequacy of the data analyses to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn** – Was the research designed to minimize alternative explanations for observed effects? Are the observed effects consistent with the overall conclusions and claims of effectiveness? Does the research present convincing documentation that the observed results were the result of the intervention? Does the research make clear what populations were studied (i.e., does it describe the participants' ages, as well as their demographic, cognitive, academic and behavioral characteristics) and does it describe to whom the findings can be generalized? Does the study provide a full description of the outcome measures?
3. **Reliance on measurements or observational methods that provided valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations** – Are the data based on a single-investigator, single-classroom study, or were similar data collected by multiple investigators in numerous locations? What procedures were in place to minimize researcher

biases? Do observed results “hold up” over time? Are the study interventions described in sufficient detail to allow for replicability? Does the research explain how instructional fidelity was ensured and assessed?

4. **Acceptance by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective and scientific review** – Has the research been carefully reviewed by unbiased individuals who were not part of the research study? Have the findings been subjected to external scrutiny and verification?

Appendix C provides additional information on using scientifically based reading research to evaluate reading program effectiveness.

B-4. Must research related to instructional programs, methods and strategies meet all of the characteristics of scientifically based reading research?

Yes. The statute specifically requires these characteristics. For additional guidance, one may wish to consult references on reading research, such as the National Academy of Sciences’ National Research Council report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (1998). The National Research Council, when conducting a review of reading research, followed basic guidelines for scientific method. The NRC wrote:

Our review and summary of the literature are framed by some very basic principles of evidence evaluation. These principles derive from our commitment to the scientific method, which we view not as a strict set of rules but instead as a broad framework defined by some general guidelines. Some of the most important are that (1) science aims for knowledge that is publicly verifiable, (2) science seeks testable theories – not unquestioned edicts, and (3) science employs methods of systematic empiricism. Science renders knowledge public by such procedures as peer review and such mechanisms as systematic replication. (p.34)

B-5. Is the State educational agency (SEA) responsible for ensuring that only programs based on scientifically based reading research are funded through Reading First?

Yes. In its application to the Department for Reading First funding, each State educational agency must demonstrate how it will assist local educational agencies in identifying instructional materials, programs, strategies and approaches based on scientifically based reading research, and how it will ensure that professional development activities related to reading instruction are based on scientifically based reading research. In determining which LEAs to support, it is the SEA’s responsibility to ensure that all programs, strategies and activities proposed and implemented meet the criteria for scientifically based reading research outlined in Question B-2.

B-6. What references are available for more information about scientifically based reading research?

Appendix E provides sources of additional information on scientifically based reading research.

C. DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE READING FIRST PROGRAM

C-1. What are the key elements of an effective reading program based on scientifically based reading research?

A high-quality reading program that is based on scientifically based research must include instructional content based on the five essential components of reading instruction (See Question B-1) integrated into a coherent instructional design. A coherent design includes explicit instructional strategies that address students' specific strengths and weaknesses, coordinated instructional sequences, ample practice opportunities and aligned student materials, and may include the use of targeted, scientifically based instructional strategies as appropriate. The design should also consider the allocation of time, including a protected, uninterrupted block of time for reading instruction of more than 90 minutes per day.

A high-quality reading program also includes assessment strategies for diagnosing student needs and measuring progress, as well as a professional development plan that ensures teachers have the skills and support necessary to implement the program effectively and to meet the reading needs of individual students.

C-2. What practices and strategies for classroom instruction should be evident in implementing a high-quality reading program based on scientifically based reading research?

Certain elements should be visible in any Reading First classroom in the country, regardless of which specific program is in use. Standards and accountability are the foundation of the Reading First classroom. Expectations are clear, as are strategies for monitoring progress toward meeting them. A comprehensive reading program provides the basis for instruction, and connects meaningfully to supplemental materials. In-class grouping strategies are in use, including small group instruction as appropriate to meet student needs. Student placement in groups is flexible, with placement and movement based on ongoing assessment, and different curricula may be in use to instruct different groups. There is active student engagement in a variety of reading-based activities, which connect to the five essential components of reading and to overall, clearly articulated academic goals. Effective classroom management and high levels of time on task are also evident.

C-3. What practices and strategies for professional development should be evident in an effective reading program?

Professional development related to a high-quality, effective reading program should aim to increase student achievement by enabling and ensuring the implementation of the particular program(s). Research has shown that teachers who participate in well-designed professional development activities get better results from their students. Well-designed professional development aligns clearly with the instructional program, including its research base, as well as with State academic and performance standards. Adequate time must be available for teachers to learn new concepts and to practice what they have learned. Coaches, mentors, peers and outside experts provide feedback as new concepts are put into practice. Professional development must prepare all teachers to teach all of the essential components of reading instruction (See Question B-1), and to know how they are related, the progression in which they should be taught, and the underlying structure of the English language. Teachers also must understand why some children have difficulty learning to read well and learn how to administer and interpret assessments of student progress. Professional development should also prepare teachers to effectively manage their classrooms and to maximize time on task.

C-4. What practices and strategies for assessment should be evident in an effective reading program?

A high-quality, effective reading program must include rigorous assessments with proven validity and reliability. These assessments must measure progress in the five essential components of reading instruction (See Question B-1) and identify students who may be at risk for reading failure or who are already experiencing reading difficulty. A reading program must include screening assessments, diagnostic assessments and classroom-based instructional assessments of progress. The administration of screening assessments determines which children are at risk for reading difficulty and need additional support. Diagnostic assessments provide more in-depth information on students' skills and instructional needs that forms the basis of the ideal instructional plan. Classroom-based instructional assessments determine whether students are making adequate progress or need more support to achieve grade-level reading outcomes.

D. FEDERAL AWARDS TO STATES

D-1. Will all States be able to participate in Reading First?

Reading First aims to improve student achievement in reading throughout the country. The Department anticipates that all States will participate. State applications, however, will be held to rigorous standards for approval. State plans must satisfactorily address all program requirements before the Department

awards funds to States. The Department will make technical assistance available to any State that needs support in developing its plan or meeting the approval criteria.

D-2. On what basis will the Department award Reading First funds to State educational agencies?

The Department will award Reading First grants to State educational agencies that submit an application that contains the statutorily required information (See Question E-1) upon approval by the Secretary after a rigorous expert review process (See Question E-4).

D-3. How are Reading First funds allocated to States?

For Fiscal Year 2002, Congress appropriated \$900 million for State grants under Reading First. With the exception of \$27.5 million available for National Activities, the Department will distribute these funds to SEAs with approved applications according to the proportion of children aged 5 to 17 who reside within the State and are from families with incomes below the poverty line, compared to the number of such children who reside in all States. Poverty data will be drawn from the most recent fiscal year for which satisfactory data are available. No State may receive less than one fourth of one percent of the total amount allocated to States, even if the proportion of children described above for that State is less than this percentage. The allocation amounts for future years will be determined by the appropriations for those years.

An exception to this formula applies to Puerto Rico. The percentage of Reading First funds allocated to Puerto Rico may not exceed the percentage of Title I, Part A funds received by Puerto Rico in the previous year.

D-4. When will Reading First funds become available to States?

Fiscal year 2002 Reading First funds become available for award to States on July 1, 2002 and remain available to the Department for award to States until September 30, 2003. States will receive their awards only upon successful approval of their applications.

D-5. When may a State educational agency submit its application for Reading First funds?

A State educational agency may submit its application for Reading First funds at any time after the Department releases application instructions, which is expected to be on or around April 1, 2002. Expert review of applications will occur in rounds, beginning thirty days after the release of the application instructions. Thus, the Department encourages SEAs to submit their applications as early as possible so that they can receive funding on a timely basis and begin the process

of awarding competitive subgrants to eligible local educational agencies. The last possible date for submission of applications for FY 2002 Reading First funds is expected to be July 1, 2003.

D-6. What is the duration of a State's Reading First award?

The Department will award Reading First grants to State educational agencies for a six-year period, subject to sufficient appropriations and submission and review of progress reports (See Questions G-5 and G-7).

D-7. What happens to a State's allocation if it does not apply for Reading First funds?

The Department anticipates that all States will participate in Reading First. However, if a State educational agency does not apply for Reading First funds, the Secretary will reallocate those funds by formula to participating States (See Question D-3). A State's failure to participate in Reading First will not have any effect on its receipt of other Federal resources.

D-8. What happens if a State's application for Reading First funds is not approved?

Any State educational agency that does not receive approval for its Reading First application will have an opportunity to address the issues and concerns raised by the expert panel reviewers. SEAs will be able to resubmit their applications for follow-on review by the expert panel. The Department will provide focused technical assistance as needed and will continue to work with the SEA until the application meets the review criteria outlined in Question E-5. While there is no limit to the number of reviews an individual SEA application can receive, the Department will announce any redistribution of Reading First funds not awarded to SEAs among States with approved Reading First plans 30 days before the period of Federal obligation for the funds expires on September 30, 2003.

D-9. Are the Outlying Areas and the Bureau of Indian Affairs eligible to receive Reading First funds?

Yes. The Secretary must reserve one half of one percent for awards to the Outlying Areas (United States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands), and one half of one percent for award to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The consolidated grant provisions for the Outlying Areas apply to awards under this program.

The Freely Associated States (the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Palau) are not eligible for Reading First funds.

D-10. What are Reading First Targeted Assistance Grants (Section 1204) and what is the timeline for applying?

Reading First Targeted Assistance grants will be available, on a competitive basis, to State educational agencies that demonstrate an increase in student achievement related to the Reading First program. In order to receive a Targeted Assistance grant, an SEA must demonstrate that increasing percentages of third graders in each of several groups in local educational agencies receiving Reading First funds are reaching the proficient level for each of two consecutive years. It must also demonstrate that schools receiving Reading First funds are improving the reading skills of students in grades 1 through 3 based on valid and reliable screening, diagnostic and classroom-based instructional reading assessments for each of the same two consecutive years and that the percentage of students in the State who are reading at grade level or above has significantly increased. Subject to appropriations, Reading First Targeted Assistance Grants will begin in fiscal year 2004. Application requirements and timeline information will be made available to States during fiscal year 2003.

E. STATE APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

E-1. What are the key issues that a State educational agency must address in its application for Reading First funding?

In their Reading First applications, States will describe their plans to provide competitive subgrants to targeted schools and districts and to use significant State leadership funds in order to improve reading instruction and student achievement. In developing their plans, State educational agencies should consider the coordination of Reading First funds with other Federal, State and local funds aimed at improving reading achievement. A State educational agency's application for Reading First funding must include:

1. **Reading and Literacy Partnership (hereinafter referred to as Reading Leadership Team)** – The application must include an assurance that the Governor of the State, in consultation with the SEA, established a Reading Leadership Team that coordinated the development of the application and that will assist in the oversight and evaluation of the State's Reading First program. (See Questions E-6 and E-7 for requirements related to this team.)
2. **Expansion of Reading Excellence Activities** – Any State that received a grant under the Reading Excellence Act must describe its strategy for the expansion, continuation or modification of its activities under that Act and how those activities fit into its overall Reading First plans.
3. **Participation in National Evaluation** – The application must include an assurance that the State educational agency and any local educational agencies

receiving a subgrant from the SEA will, if requested, participate in the Department's national evaluation of the Reading First program.

4. **Reading First Plan** – The application must describe the State educational agency's plan for implementing the Reading First program. The plan must include the following:
 - a. **Identifying reading assessments with proven validity and reliability** – The SEA must describe how it will assist local educational agencies in identifying screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based instructional reading assessments.
 - b. **Identifying scientifically based materials and programs** – The SEA must describe how it will assist local educational agencies in identifying instructional materials, programs, strategies and approaches that are based on scientifically based reading research.
 - c. **Professional development** – The SEA must describe how professional development activities supported with Reading First funds will effectively improve instructional practices for reading and ensure that these activities are based on scientifically based reading research. The SEA must also describe how it will coordinate professional development activities funded through Reading First with activities funded with other Federal, State and local level funds.
 - d. **Implementing the essential components of reading instruction--** The SEA must describe how funded activities will help teachers and other instructional staff to implement the essential components of reading. (See Question B-1.)
 - e. **Subgrant process** – The application must describe the process by which the SEA will make competitive grants to eligible local educational agencies, including how the SEA will ensure that eligible LEAs receiving subgrants will use practices based on scientifically based reading research. The SEA may wish to provide its draft LEA application or other draft guidance, if available.
 - f. **Geographic diversity** – The SEA must describe how it will ensure, to the extent practicable, that it will award subgrants to eligible local educational agencies in both rural and urban areas.
 - g. **Program coordination** – The SEA must describe how it will build on and promote coordination among literacy programs in the State to increase their overall effectiveness in improving reading instruction.

- h. **Evaluation Strategies** – The SEA must describe how it will assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the activities carried out under the program on a regular basis. SEAs must use valid and reliable instruments to measure progress in improving student achievement and should describe how it will use these data in determining whether local educational agencies should receive continuation funding of their subgrant awards.

E-2. May a State address the issues identified in Question E-1 in its ESEA consolidated plan rather than submitting a separate Reading First application?

No. While the Department encourages States to consider the coordination of Reading First with other Federal programs in the development of their consolidated plans, the Reading First legislation specifically requires review of State applications for Reading First funds by experts convened by the Department, the National Institute for Literacy, the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. This requirement makes it infeasible to permit States to apply for Reading First through the consolidated application.

E-3. May a State submit a modified application for Reading First funds if it has received a grant under the Reading Excellence Act?

Although SEAs must submit a new application for Reading First, the Department recognizes that State educational agencies that received grants under the Reading Excellence Act may have previously submitted some of the information required in the Reading First application. SEAs that have received grants under the Reading Excellence Act are encouraged, where appropriate, to include relevant information, plans and/or descriptions of activities as part of their Reading First application submissions to avoid the duplication of previous efforts. In particular, States may find portions of the Reading Excellence application Section 2, Part B (Understanding of Scientifically Based Reading Research), Section 2, Part C (Current State Efforts in Reading), Section 3, Part B, Subpart 2 (Use of Funds for Teacher Professional Development), Section 3, Part B, Subpart 3 (Application Process) and Section 3, Part B, Subpart 4 (Technical Assistance) relevant to their Reading First applications, and may draw from these sections where appropriate to satisfy Reading First requirements. While only one question in the Reading First application expressly addresses the relationship between REA and Reading First activities, States should consider the connection throughout their Reading First plans.

Further, as Reading First plans must include statewide professional development activities and must ensure that all children served receive reading instruction based on scientifically based reading research, modified Reading Excellence Act activities are likely to form just part of an SEA's approved Reading First plan. It

is incumbent upon applicant SEAs to describe how and to what extent current Reading Excellence activities can be successfully leveraged within the proposed Reading First statewide plan.

E-4. Who will review State applications for Reading First?

An expert review panel will evaluate State applications. The Secretary, in consultation with the National Institute for Literacy, will convene the panel. The panel will recommend grant applications to the Secretary for funding or recommend clarifications or changes deemed necessary to improve the likelihood of the plan's success. As required by the statute, the review panel of experts will include individuals selected by the Secretary of Education, the National Institute for Literacy, the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Each panel will likely include at least one person with expertise in the following: scientifically based educational research, professional development and teacher training, instructional assessments, professional management, SEA program implementation and administration, and teacher education. Together, this team of experts and professionals with relevant, real-world experience will be exceptionally qualified to evaluate, and, where necessary, to help improve both the suitability and feasibility of each State's Reading First plan.

E-5. What specific review criteria will be used to evaluate applications?

A State educational agency's application must meet rigorous standards demonstrating capacity to improve reading achievement significantly. The application must meet all standards in order for an SEA's funds to be awarded. Technical assistance will be available throughout the review process to ensure the quality of every component of the plan. The expert review panel will expect to see the following criteria included in the application:

1. **Improving Reading Instruction** – The SEA's application describes the State's rationale for using scientifically based reading research to improve classroom reading instruction in the State, and its plan for achieving that goal. This part of the application includes the State's plan for subgranting Reading First funds to targeted LEAs and schools, as well as for providing statewide professional development based on scientifically based reading research. The application must specifically address the following:
 - a. Current Reading Initiatives and Identified Gaps
 - b. State Outline and Rationale for Using Scientifically Based Reading Research
 - c. State Definition of Subgrant Eligibility

- d. Selection Criteria for Awarding Subgrants
 - i. Schools to be served
 - ii. Instructional Assessments
 - iii. Instructional Strategies and Programs
 - iv. Instructional Materials
 - v. Instructional Leadership
 - vi. District and School Based Professional Development
 - vii. District Based Technical Assistance
 - viii. Evaluation Strategies
 - ix. Access to Print Materials
 - x. Additional Criteria
 - xi. Competitive Priorities
 - e. Process for Awarding Subgrants
 - f. State Professional Development Plan
 - g. Integration of Proposed Reading First Activities with REA
2. **State Leadership and Management** – The SEA’s application describes the State’s plan for providing coherent leadership by 1) providing targeted LEAs and schools that receive Reading First subgrants with technical assistance in implementing strategies to improve reading instruction that are based on scientifically based reading research; and 2) building a statewide Reading Leadership Team to coordinate State efforts to improve reading instruction and to provide a leadership capability that approves and monitors the underlying scientific base of the instruction implemented by targeted districts and schools. The application must also demonstrate a feasible plan to effectively manage its Reading First program. The application must specifically address the following:
- a. State Technical Assistance Plan
 - b. Building Statewide Infrastructure

- c. State Management Plan
3. **State Reporting and Evaluation** – The SEA’s application describes the strategies the State will use to evaluate the effectiveness of its Reading First program and to report required information annually. Each SEA will have to explain how its evaluations will effectively monitor the academic impact of Reading First on its recipient LEAs. Further, the SEA must explain what steps the SEA will take in the event of inadequate academic progress within LEAs receiving subgrant awards. The application must specifically address the following:
 - a. Evaluation Strategies
 - b. State Reporting
 - c. Participation in National Evaluation
 4. **Classroom Level Impact** – The SEA’s application describes how the many facets of its Reading First plan will result in improved classroom reading instruction. The application includes the SEA’s vision for how a Reading First classroom should look and demonstrates the integration and coherence among the many components of the plan. The application must specifically address the following:
 - a. Key Reading First Classroom Characteristics
 - b. Coherence

E-6. What is the requirement for a Reading Leadership Team?

Prior to applying for Reading First, the Governor of the State, in consultation with the State educational agency, must establish a Reading Leadership Team. The Department strongly encourages SEAs to create a Reading Leadership Team that monitors and examines the scientific base for instruction in schools that need to improve reading achievement. This reading team will ensure a seamless, complementary approach to reading achievement throughout the State. SEAs must include in their application an assurance that the Reading Leadership Team coordinated the development of the State’s Reading First plan and how it will assist in oversight and evaluation.

The team must include, at minimum, the following participants:

1. The Governor of the State
2. The chief State school officer

3. The chairman and the ranking member of each committee of the State legislature that is responsible for education policy
4. A representative, selected jointly by the Governor and the chief State school officer, of at least one local educational agency that is eligible to receive a Reading First subgrant
5. A representative, selected jointly by the Governor and the chief State school officer, of a community-based organization working with children to improve their reading skills, particularly a community-based organization that uses tutors and scientifically based reading research
6. State directors of appropriate Federal or State programs that have a strong reading component, selected jointly by the Governor and the chief State school officer
7. A parent of a public or private school student or a parent who educates his or her child at home, selected jointly by the Governor and the chief State school officer
8. A teacher, who may be a special education teacher, who successfully teaches reading, and another instructional staff member, selected jointly by the Governor and the chief State school officer
9. A family literacy service provider, selected jointly by the Governor and the chief State school officer

The Reading Leadership Team may include additional participants, selected jointly by the Governor and the chief State school officer. Additional participants may include:

1. An institution of higher education operating a program of teacher preparation based on scientifically based reading research;
2. A local educational agency;
3. A private nonprofit or for-profit eligible professional development provider providing instruction based on scientifically based reading research;
4. An adult education provider;
5. A volunteer organization that is involved in reading programs; or
6. A school library or a public library that offers reading or literacy programs for children or families

E-7. Will a Reading and Literacy Partnership established to meet the requirements of the Reading Excellence Act meet the requirements of Reading First?

Yes. If a State educational agency established a Reading and Literacy Partnership to meet the requirements of the Reading Excellence Act, that partnership may be considered a Reading Leadership Team for the purposes of Reading First.

F. FUNDS RESERVED FOR STATE USE

F-1. May a State educational agency reserve a portion of its allocation for State use?

Yes. A State educational agency that receives a Reading First grant may reserve up to 20 percent of its total allocation to carry out activities related to professional inservice and preservice development; technical assistance for local educational agencies and schools; and planning, administration and reporting. By design, this significant level of funding will provide States with the resources and opportunity to extend this reading initiative and to improve instruction beyond the specific districts and schools that receive Reading First subgrants.

These funds will assist States in building and maintaining statewide capacity to teach all children to read by the end of third grade.

F-2. For what purposes may a State educational agency use funds reserved for State use?

Of the total funds reserved for State use (up to 20 percent of the State's total allocation), a State educational agency may expend up to 65 percent for professional inservice and preservice development, up to 25 percent for technical assistance to local educational agencies and schools, and up to 10 percent for planning, administration and reporting. An SEA must use any funds not reserved for these purposes for subgrants to local educational agencies. Funds reserved for State use shall be used for the following purposes:

1. Professional Inservice and Preservice Development and Review

- a. **Development and implementation of a program of professional development** for teachers of kindergarten through grade 3, including special education teachers, that will prepare these teachers in all the essential components of reading instruction. This includes providing teachers with information on instructional materials, programs, strategies and approaches based on scientifically based reading research, including early intervention and reading remediation materials, programs and approaches, as well as on instruction in the

use of valid and reliable screening, diagnostic and classroom-based instructional reading assessment instruments and other procedures that effectively identify students who may be at risk for reading failure or who are having reading difficulty. An ‘eligible professional development provider’ must deliver this program. (See Appendix D for definitions.) Professional development must clearly align with the instructional program, including its research base, as well as with State academic and performance standards. The professional development program must provide adequate time for teachers to learn new concepts and to practice what they have learned, and should include a variety of delivery methods.

- b. **Strengthening and enhancing preservice courses** for students preparing, at public institutions of higher education in the State, to teach kindergarten through grade 3. This would be done by reviewing course content to determine if content is consistent with the most current findings of scientifically based reading research, including findings on the essential components of reading instruction, offering recommendations based on this review to ensure that such institutions offer courses that meet the highest standards, and preparing a report on the results of these recommendations. The report would be submitted to the Reading Leadership Team of the State and made available for public review via the Internet.
 - c. **Improving State licensure and certification standards** by making recommendations as to how standards in the area of reading might be improved.
2. **Technical Assistance for Local Educational Agencies (one or both of the following)**
- a. **Assisting local educational agencies** in accomplishing the tasks required to design and to implement a Reading First program. This includes assistance in selecting and implementing a program or programs of reading instruction based on scientifically based reading research, selecting rigorous screening, diagnostic and classroom-based instructional reading assessments with proven validity and reliability, and identifying eligible professional development providers to help prepare reading teachers to teach students using these programs and assessments.
 - b. **Providing expanded opportunities** to students in kindergarten through grade 3 who are served by eligible local educational agencies for receiving reading assistance from alternative providers. SEAs seeking to use funds for this purpose must ensure that these providers use programs and strategies that are based on scientifically based

reading research and the essential components of reading instruction and that align with the SEA's overall Reading First plan.

3. **Planning, Administration and Reporting** – including administering competitive subgrants to eligible local educational agencies, using valid and reliable measures to assess and evaluate on a regular basis whether local educational agency Reading First activities have been effective in increasing the number of children in grades 1 through 3 served by Reading First who can read at or above grade level, and meeting reporting requirements.

F-3. Are there any required priorities for funds reserved for State use?

Yes. A State educational agency shall give priority in carrying out the activities described in Question F-2 to serving schools that both (1) are operated by eligible local educational agencies and that have the highest percentages or numbers of students in kindergarten through grade 3 reading below grade level, based on the most currently available data, and (2) are identified for school improvement under Title I, Part A or have the highest percentages or numbers of children counted for allocations under Title I, Part A.

F-4. Must activities supported by Reading First funds reserved for State use be based on scientifically based reading research?

Yes. All activities related to professional development and technical assistance supported by Reading First funds reserved for State use must be based on scientifically based reading research, as described in the State educational agency's application for funding.

G. PROGRAM EVALUATION AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

G-1. Must a State educational agency conduct an evaluation of its Reading First program?

Yes. Each State educational agency that receives Reading First funds must assess and evaluate, on a regular basis, the progress of local educational agencies that receive subgrants in meeting the goals of the Reading First program. SEAs must use valid and reliable instruments to measure progress in improving student achievement, and should use this data in determining whether local educational agencies should receive continuation funding of their subgrant awards. (See Question H-15.) The Secretary encourages States to submit their evaluation to the Department as a supplement to the required annual report. (See Question G-4.)

G-2. Who should conduct the State's evaluation of its Reading First program?

Each State educational agency must contract, to the extent practicable, with an entity that conducts scientifically based reading research to evaluate its Reading First program. In addition, the Department encourages SEAs to contract with entities that also conduct program evaluations. The SEA remains responsible for submitting all required information and reports to the Department.

G-3. What information must a State educational agency that receives a Reading First grant provide to the Department?

A State educational agency that receives a Reading First grant must submit to the Department an annual report on the State's implementation of the Reading First program. At the end of the third year of Reading First, the SEA must submit to the Department a midpoint progress report describing the achievement of students served by the Reading First program.

In addition, during 2002 and beyond, the Department will work with SEAs to establish data standards for performance indicators and other information collected from States. The Department will confer with SEA and other officials, the research community, information technology vendors, and other interested parties on ways in which States, LEAs and schools can collect and electronically record useful baseline and follow-up data through an internet based format. The new format should accommodate the measurement of success relative to the various indicators that the Department and States have adopted. Reporting guidelines, therefore, will stress electronic reporting and provide States with additional options in fulfilling federal information requests.

G-4. What information must be included in the annual report?

The annual report must include the following information. The SEA must ensure that it reports all data in a manner that protects the privacy of individuals.

1. **Implementation Evidence** – The SEA must demonstrate that it has met all program requirements and obligations related to the implementation and administration of the Reading First program.
2. **Achievement Gains** – The SEA must specifically identify the schools and local educational agencies within the State that report the largest gains in reading achievement.
3. **Program Effectiveness** – The SEA must report on the progress the SEA and local educational agencies are making in reducing the number of students in grades 1 through 3 served by Reading First who are reading below grade level. SEAs should select methods of collecting and reporting this

information that will result in the submission of data that are valid and reliable.

4. **Reducing Students Reading Below Grade Level Statewide** – The SEA must report on whether it and local educational agencies have significantly increased the number of students reading at grade level or above, including whether the percentages of students in certain categories reading at grade level or above have increased.

G-5. What information must be included in the midpoint progress report?

Each State educational agency must provide a progress report to the Department within sixty days of the termination of the third year – the midpoint - of the overall grant period. The midpoint progress report must include information on the progress the SEA and local educational agencies within the State are making in reducing the number of students served by Reading First in grades 1 through 3 who are reading below grade level. SEAs should select methods of collecting and reporting this information that will result in the submission of data that are valid and reliable. The report must also include evidence from the SEA and LEAs within the State that the number of students reading at grade level or above has significantly increased, including the percentages of students in certain categories.

G-6. Who will evaluate the midpoint progress report?

The expert review panel convened to review State applications (See Question E-4) will evaluate third-year progress reports.

G-7. What are the consequences if a State educational agency is not making significant progress in meeting the purposes of the Reading First program?

If the Secretary determines, after submission and panel review of a State educational agency's midpoint progress report and based on ongoing Department monitoring, that the SEA is not making significant progress in meeting the purposes of the Reading First program, the Secretary may withhold from the SEA, in whole or in part, further payments of Reading First funds in accordance with section 455 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA), or take other actions authorized by law that the Secretary determines necessary, including providing technical assistance upon request of the SEA.

H. STATE AWARDS TO LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES (LEAs)

H-1. What entities are eligible to apply to a State educational agency for Reading First funds?

A local educational agency that meets both of the following criteria is eligible to apply to its State educational agency for Reading First funds:

1. The LEA is among the local educational agencies in the State with the highest numbers or percentages of students in kindergarten through grade 3 reading below grade level, based on the most current data available; and
2. The LEA has jurisdiction over at least one of the following:
 - a. A geographic area that includes an area designated as an empowerment zone, or an enterprise community, under part I of subchapter U of chapter I of the Internal Revenue Code;
 - b. A significant number or percentage of schools that are identified for school improvement under Title I, Part A; or
 - c. The highest numbers or percentages of children who are counted for allocations under Title I, Part A, in comparison to other LEAs in the State

SEAs have flexibility to define and establish these eligibility criteria within the statutory guidelines. In defining eligibility, SEAs should consider many factors, including the number and size of subgrant awards. LEAs must receive sufficient funding and support to improve reading instruction. Eligibility pools and anticipated numbers of subgrants that seem too large to accomplish this are unlikely to be approved by the expert panel. The applicant pool that results from this definition should be sufficiently targeted to ensure adequate funding and support, yet broad enough to ensure that only applications of the highest quality are funded. SEAs should also ensure that their eligibility definition results in a geographically diverse applicant pool.

H-2. May a consortium of local educational agencies apply to their State educational agency?

Yes. Consistent with Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) requirements, two or more local educational agencies may apply to their State educational agency as a consortium. Each local educational agency within the consortium must meet the eligibility requirements outlined in Question H-1.

H-3. On what basis does a State educational agency award subgrants to eligible local educational agencies?

A State educational agency awards subgrants to eligible LEAs on a competitive basis. The SEA must subgrant at least 80 percent of its total Reading First award to eligible LEAs.

In order to best address the intent of the legislation – that is, to ensure that every student can read at grade level or above by the end of third grade through the use of programs, materials, strategies and approaches based on scientifically based reading research – an SEA should develop selection criteria that truly distinguish among the quality of programs and approaches proposed by applicants. SEAs should seek to fund only those proposals that show real promise for successful implementation, particularly at the classroom level, and for raising student achievement.

H-4. Are there any required priorities for awarding Reading First subgrants?

In making awards to local educational agencies, SEAs must give priority to eligible local educational agencies that meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. At least fifteen percent of the students served by the eligible local educational agency are from families with incomes below the poverty line; or
2. At least 6,500 children served by the eligible local educational agency are from families with incomes below the poverty line.

H-5. Do State educational agencies have discretion to define the ‘poverty line,’ as referred to in Question H-4?

No. In accordance with Section 9101(33) of ESEA, the poverty line refers to the official Office of Management and Budget definition, which is revised annually. The Department provides these data to SEAs annually as part of the administration of Title I, Part A.

H-6. What discretion does a State educational agency have in selecting competitive criteria for its subgrant process?

In addition to the required priority described in Question H-4, a State educational agency may establish other priorities as a part of its overall reform strategy that further the purposes of the Reading First program. However, such priorities may not negate the effect of the required priority, and should give LEAs or programs a competitive edge in the subgrant selection process, rather than entirely preclude non-priority LEAs or programs.

In order to ensure that subgrants to LEAs are of the highest quality, the Department strongly encourages States to award a competitive priority to LEAs that can demonstrate evidence of successful implementation of instructional strategies and programs based on scientifically based reading research. This evidence should be measured using appropriate assessment instruments with proven validity and reliability. A competitive priority may also be awarded to LEAs that demonstrate the need for Reading First funds in the specific schools that will receive Reading First funds. States should also consider awarding a priority to LEAs that can demonstrate leadership and commitment to improving reading achievement, as well as to LEAs that will leverage existing reading initiative components for maximum effect within an overall Reading First plan. In addition, the Department encourages SEAs to award a competitive priority to LEAs that receive Early Reading First grants.

H-7. What responsibility does a State educational agency have with respect to local educational agencies' and schools' choices of reading programs?

In its application for Reading First Funds, a State educational agency must describe the process and selection criteria by which the SEA will make competitive grants to eligible local educational agencies and how the SEA will ensure that the instructional materials, programs, strategies and approaches it will fund, as well as its professional development activities related to reading instruction, are based on scientifically based reading research. Thus, the SEA is responsible for ensuring that Reading First funds go only to LEAs that will implement high-quality programs that meet the requirements of Reading First. In carrying out this responsibility, an SEA has considerable flexibility. For example, an SEA may establish a competitive preference for particular materials, programs, strategies and approaches based on scientifically based reading research that the SEA determines are particularly effective.

H-8. May a State educational agency use Reading First funds to award a planning grant to a local educational agency that is still developing its Reading First plan?

No. Reading First grants are for implementation and not planning purposes. Planning activities, such as conducting a needs assessment, are not appropriate uses of Reading First funds. However, certain activities, such as the selection of instructional reading assessments, that contribute to the further development of the LEA's Reading First program are permissible. See Question I-4 for more information on permissible activities.

H-9. May Reading First funds be used to support LEAs and schools that are already implementing a reading program based on scientifically based reading research?

Yes. States are encouraged to award Reading First subgrants to local educational agencies that will use the funds to support schools that have begun to implement a reading program based on scientifically based reading research. These schools must, however, meet all program requirements and should use their Reading First funds to expand and strengthen their existing program.

H-10. May LEAs and schools that currently receive Reading Excellence funds also receive Reading First funds?

Yes. Schools that are currently receiving funds through the Reading Excellence Act may also receive Reading First funds. These schools must meet all Reading First program requirements, and should use their Reading First funds to expand and strengthen their existing reading programs to ensure that all students can read at grade level or above by the end of third grade. It is the Department's view that the mainstream K-3 classroom is the primary venue for Reading First activities.

H-11. Do State educational agencies have flexibility regarding the timing of their subgrant competitions?

Yes. Reading First funds that become available to the Department on July 1, 2002 will be available for obligation by an SEA or an LEA through September 30, 2004. (This period of availability includes an initial fifteen-month obligation period and a twelve-month 'carryover' period authorized by section 421(b) of the General Education Provisions Act.) Accordingly, an SEA should consider the urgency for LEAs and schools to improve reading instruction, as well as the time needed by LEAs to develop high-quality Reading First programs. An SEA may wish to run separate competitions, awarding a portion of its funds soon after the State receives them while reserving the remaining funds for LEAs that need additional time to develop their plans.

H-12. In applying to its State educational agency for a competitive award under this program, what information must a local educational agency include in its subgrant application?

An eligible local educational agency must submit an application to the State educational agency in order to be considered for Reading First funding. In addition to any information required by the State, applications must demonstrate how the LEA will carry out the following required activities:

1. **Instructional reading assessments** -- Selection and administration of rigorous screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based instructional reading

assessments with proven validity and reliability, and how information from these assessments will be used to make instructional decisions.

2. **Reading program** -- Selection and implementation of a program of reading instruction that is based on scientifically based reading research and that includes the essential components of reading instruction and provides such instruction to children in kindergarten through grade 3. LEAs must demonstrate how this reading program will be implemented, and that it will not be layered on top of non-research based programs already in use. The scientifically based reading program must also align to State academic and performance standards to ensure that students will be able to reach the proficiency level on State assessments.
3. **Instructional materials** – Selection and implementation of instructional materials, including education technology such as software and other digital curricula, that are based on scientifically based reading research.
4. **Professional development** -- Professional development for teachers of kindergarten through grade 3 and special education teachers of kindergarten through grade 12, that will prepare these teachers in all the essential components of reading instruction and to use the selected instructional materials. Professional development must clearly align with the instructional program, including its research base, as well as with State academic and performance standards, and include adequate time for teachers to learn new concepts and to practice what they have learned. Professional development must be an ongoing, continuous activity, and not consist of ‘one-shot’ workshops or lectures. Delivery mechanisms should include the use of coaches and other teachers of reading who provide feedback as instructional strategies are put into practice.
5. **Evaluation strategies** – Collection and summary of data relating to the program. Evaluation strategies must include the use of valid and reliable measures to assess the effectiveness of local Reading First activities for individual schools and the district as a whole.
6. **Reporting** – LEAs must report data for all students and categories of students described in the State’s adequate yearly progress definition.
7. **Access to reading material** – Promotion of reading and library programs that provide access to engaging reading material.

See question I-4 for more information on the required uses of funds. Each LEA application must also include the following assurances:

1. A description of the steps the LEA proposes to take to overcome barriers to equitable program participation, as required under section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act
2. The general assurances in section 9306 of the ESEA
3. The lower-tier certification covering lobbying and debarment/suspension under 34 CFR Parts 82 and 85.

H-13. What is the minimum amount of Reading First funds that a State educational agency may provide to a local educational agency?

Each LEA that receives a competitive subgrant must receive at least the same percentage of the State's total Reading First subgrant funds as the LEA received of the total Title I, Part A funds received by all LEAs in the State for the preceding fiscal year. For example, if an LEA received 3 percent of the total amount of the State's Title I, Part A funds in FY 2001, that LEA must receive at least 3 percent of the total amount of Reading First funds subgranted in that State in FY 2002.

Once an SEA has determined the minimum amount that an LEA can receive as described above, it must also ensure that Reading First subgrants are of sufficient size and scope to enable eligible LEAs to fully implement programs to improve reading instruction. The expert review panel will consider whether the number of subgrants an SEA proposes to make is likely to result in awards of sufficient size and scope, and is unlikely to recommend approval of plans that will result in diluted, insufficient amounts of funding to LEAs. The amount of funds awarded to an LEA must also relate to the number or percentage of students in kindergarten through grade 3 in that LEA who are reading below grade level.

The requirement described under this question does not create an entitlement for LEAs. In order to obtain subgrants, LEAs must succeed in the State's competition for funding.

H-14. For how many years may a particular local educational agency or school receive Reading First assistance?

By statute, State educational agencies may award Reading First subgrants for a period of not more than six years. However, the Department strongly encourages States to limit the subgrant period to a duration of two to three years. After the initial subgrant period, LEAs that have shown strong reading gains and significantly increased student achievement would be eligible for renewal of their subgrants.

H-15. On what basis does a State educational agency make continuation awards to local educational agencies?

In making continuation awards to local educational agencies, State educational agencies must assess the progress each local educational agency has made in improving student reading achievement and implementing the program outlined in its subgrant application.

H-16. May a State educational agency discontinue funding to a local educational agency that is not making substantial progress?

Yes. A State educational agency may discontinue funding to any local educational agency that is not making substantial progress in improving student reading achievement and implementing the program outlined in its subgrant application.

H-17. Are public charter schools eligible to participate in the Reading First program?

Yes. Under State law, public charter schools are generally either local educational agencies or public schools within an LEA. As such, public charter schools are eligible for support on the same basis as other public schools or LEAs in the State.

If State law recognizes a charter school as an LEA and the charter school meets the eligibility requirements outlined in Question H-1, it may apply to its State educational agency for a subgrant as an LEA. If a charter school is a school within an LEA, it may receive funding through its LEA's subgrant if it meets the criteria outlined in Question I-1.

H-18. What are the implications of the Charter School Expansion Act of 1998 on Reading First awards?

The Charter School Expansion Act reinforces the Department's policy that public charter schools must be able to compete for Reading First funds on an equal footing with other public schools and local educational agencies. They may not be discriminated against in competing for funds simply because of their charter school status, nor may competitive preferences or absolute priorities be established for the purpose of excluding charter schools from competing for Reading First funds.

H-19. May charter schools that are not local educational agencies apply directly to the State educational agency for Reading First subgrants?

No. Only local educational agencies may apply directly to a State educational agency for Reading First funds. A charter school that is not an LEA under State law may not apply directly to the State for funding.

H-20. May an intermediate unit within a State apply for Reading First funds on behalf of eligible schools for which it provides services?

An intermediate unit may only apply for Reading First funds if it is a local educational agency under section 9101(26) of ESEA and meets the eligibility requirements outlined in Question H-1.

H-21. Are private school children eligible to participate in the Reading First program?

Yes. Funds awarded to State educational agencies and local educational agencies under Reading First are subject to the requirements of Section 9501 of ESEA (Participation by Private School Children and Teachers). The statute requires LEAs to provide private school children and their teachers or other educational personnel with educational services that address their needs related to Reading First on an equitable basis with public school children and teachers. LEAs must provide these services in a timely manner.

Funds provided for educational services and other benefits for private school children and their teachers must be equal, taking into account the number and educational needs of the children to be served, to the funds provided for participating public school children.

All services and benefits provided to private school children and their teachers under Reading First must be secular, neutral, and non-ideological.

Local educational agencies seeking Reading First subgrants must consult with appropriate private school officials during the design and development of their Reading First plans on such issues as determining eligibility of private school children (see question H-22); identifying the children's needs; what services will be offered; how, where, and by whom services will be provided; and how the services will be assessed.

H-22. How is the eligibility of private school children determined?

In general, private school children in the areas served by public schools receiving Reading First funds would be eligible. This determination can be made *either* by the residence of private school children in the attendance area of a public school receiving Reading First funds or by the location of a private school in the

attendance area of a public school receiving Reading First funds. For additional information on which public schools within an eligible local educational agency may receive Reading First funds, see question I-1.

H-23. If a State educational agency chooses not to apply for Reading First funding, may local educational agencies in that State still receive Reading First funds?

No. The Department will reallocate funds allotted to a State educational agency that chooses not to participate in Reading First to other States participating in the program. (See Question D-7.)

H-24. Are Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools eligible to compete for Reading First funds?

Yes. The Department will allocate Reading First funds to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, pending submission and approval of its application. In turn, BIA will make subgrants through a competitive process. In addition, a BIA school that is considered by the State in which it is located to be a local educational agency is eligible to apply to the State for Reading First funds as an LEA. However, while these schools may compete under both the BIA and SEA competitions, they may not receive Reading First funds from both the BIA and the SEA.

H-25. If generic proposals are submitted to a State educational agency on behalf of different local educational agencies, should the SEA consider such proposals for funding?

While local educational agencies may work with an external service provider or a proposal-writing firm in developing its application for Reading First funds, the submission of an “off-the-shelf” proposal without a direct focus on the needs of that LEA is unlikely to address program requirements satisfactorily. The State educational agency should carefully evaluate the content of such proposals, and should not fund inadequate “off-the-shelf” or generic proposals.

I. LOCAL USE OF FUNDS

I-1. In which schools may a local educational agency use Reading First funds?

A local educational agency that receives a Reading First subgrant may only distribute funds to schools within that LEA that are both:

1. Among the schools served by the LEA with the highest percentages or numbers of students in kindergarten through grade 3 reading below grade level, based on the most current data available; and

2. Identified for school improvement under Title I, Part A or have the highest percentages or numbers of children counted for allocations under section Title I, Part A.

I-2. May middle schools, junior high schools or high schools receive Reading First funds?

No. The purpose of the Reading First program is to ensure that every student can read at grade level or above by the end of grade 3. Only schools that include kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2 or grade 3 may receive Reading First funds. Schools that include additional grades may only use Reading First funds for purposes related to kindergarten through grade 3 instruction. An exception applies to professional development for K-12 special education teachers. LEAs must provide professional development on the essential components of reading instruction to all K-12 special education teachers, including those based in middle schools, junior high schools and high schools.

I-3. May pre-kindergarten programs receive Reading First funds?

No. Reading First funds may only serve students in kindergarten through grade 3. Early Reading First, a separate program authorized under Title I, Part B, Subpart 2, will award funds on a competitive basis to support local efforts to enhance the early language, literacy and prereading development of preschool age children through strategies and professional development that are based on scientifically based reading research. For more information on the relationship between Reading First and Early Reading First, see question J-2.

I-4. For what activities may a local educational agency or school use Reading First funds?

An eligible local educational agency that receives a Reading First subgrant must use the funds to carry out the following activities:

1. **Instructional reading assessments** -- Selection and administration of rigorous screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based instructional reading assessments with proven validity and reliability. These assessments must measure progress in the essential components of reading instruction (see Question B-1) and identify students who may be at risk for reading failure or who are already experiencing reading difficulty.
2. **Reading program** -- Selection and implementation of a program of reading instruction based on scientifically based reading research that includes the essential components of reading instruction and provides such instruction to children in kindergarten through grade 3 in the schools served by the LEA, including children:

- a. With reading difficulties
- b. At risk of referral to special education based on those difficulties
- c. Evaluated under section 614 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act but not identified as having a disability (in accordance with IDEA section 614(b)(5) and as defined in section 602)
- d. Served under IDEA primarily due to a specific learning disability related to reading (as defined in IDEA section 602)
- e. Deficient in the essential components of reading instruction
- f. Identified as having limited English proficiency

A high-quality reading program that is based on scientifically based research must include instructional content based on the five essential components of reading instruction (See Question B-1) integrated into a coherent instructional design. A coherent design includes explicit instructional strategies, coordinated instructional sequences, ample practice opportunities and aligned student materials. The design should also consider the allocation of time, ensuring a protected, dedicated block of time for reading instruction.

3. **Instructional materials** – Selection and implementation of instructional materials, including education technology such as software and other digital curricula, that are based on scientifically based reading research
4. **Professional development** -- Professional development for teachers of kindergarten through grade 3 and special education teachers of kindergarten through grade 12 that will prepare these teachers and other instructional staff in all of the essential components of reading instruction. Professional development must be provided that will assist teachers in becoming fully qualified for reading instruction in accordance with the requirements of section 1119. Providers of professional development must base training in reading instruction on scientifically based reading research. Professional development must be delivered by eligible providers and must address:
 - a. Information, instructional materials, programs, strategies and approaches based on scientifically based reading research, including early intervention, classroom reading materials, and remedial programs and approaches;
 - b. Instruction in the use of screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based instructional reading assessments and other procedures that effectively identify students who may be at risk for reading failure or who are having difficulty reading

5. **Evaluation strategies** – Collection and summary of valid and reliable data to document the effectiveness of Reading First in individual schools and in the LEA as a whole and to stimulate and accelerate improvement by identifying the schools that produce significant gains in reading achievement
6. **Reporting** – The LEA must report data for all students and categories of students described in the State’s Title I adequate yearly progress definition.
7. **Access to reading material** – Promotion of reading and library programs that provide access to engaging reading material

There may be additional activities for which an LEA may use Reading First funds, provided they are based on scientifically based reading research and align with the LEA’s overall Reading First plan.

I-5. May programs or activities that are not based on scientifically based reading research be supported by Reading First funds?

No. All materials, programs, strategies, approaches and professional development activities supported by Reading First must be based on scientifically based reading research.

I-6. May a local educational agency use Reading First funds to cover costs for administrative expenses, technical assistance and evaluation activities?

Yes. An eligible local educational agency that receives a subgrant may use up to 3.5 percent of its Reading First funds for its own planning and administration purposes.

I-7. May pre-award costs be charged to the Reading First subgrant?

If a local educational agency incurs costs after receiving notification of its Reading First award but before the effective date of the award, these costs may be charged to the Reading First grant to the extent they would have been allowable if incurred after the award date. The LEA must receive written approval from the State educational agency.

I-8. May Reading First funds be used by a local educational agency for costs incurred after the subgrant period ends?

A local educational agency that receives a Reading First subgrant may only use Reading First funds for allowable costs during the subgrant award period. For example, an LEA is free to enter into a multi-year contract with a service provider; however, Reading First funds may only be used for allowable costs related to that contract that occur within the subgrant award period.

I-9. To what extent may waivers be sought to facilitate the implementation of a local educational agency Reading First program?

The Department will not grant any waiver that would undermine the intent and purposes of the Reading First program. Therefore, the Department will only consider waivers related to Reading First under limited and exceptional circumstances. In those instances, and consistent with the waiver provisions and limitations of section 9401 of the Elementary and Secondary Education, a local educational agency that receives Reading First funds may apply to the Department for waivers of Reading First requirements, if the requirements sought to be waived impede the LEA's ability to carry out its Reading First program and the waiver would be consistent with the overall objective and structure of the program.

However, a local educational agency that receives Reading First funds may apply to the Department for waivers of requirements of other major Federal education programs, if the requirements sought to be waived impede the LEA's ability to carry out its Reading First program.

I-10. Does the Ed-Flex waiver authority apply to the Reading First program?

No. SEAs and LEAs seeking waivers of Reading First requirements must apply to the Department under the waiver authority in section 9401 of the ESEA. (See Question I-9.) The Department will not grant any waiver that would undermine the intent and purposes of the Reading First program.

I-11. When does the period of availability for FY 2002 Reading First funds end?

Grantees or subgrantees must obligate FY 2002 Reading First funds by September 30, 2004. The Department's regulations at 34 CFR 76.707 (available at: www.ed.gov/policy/fund/reg/edgarReg/edlite-part76g.html) describe when an obligation occurs with respect to various categories of activities. The awarding of subgrants to LEAs does not constitute an obligation.

I-12. How long are Reading First funds available for obligation?

Reading First funds become available on July 1 of a given fiscal year and are initially available for obligation through September 30 of the succeeding fiscal year, a fifteen-month period. If unobligated funds remain after this initial period of availability, a State educational agency may carry over those funds, that remain available for obligation during an additional twelve-month period under the "Tydings amendment." For example, fiscal year 2002 Reading First funds become available on July 1, 2002. They are initially available for obligation through September 30, 2003; then, an SEA may carry over any unobligated funds and obligate them through September 30, 2004.

State educational agencies and local educational agencies must obligate funds during the period for which the funds are available for obligation. Please note that an obligation does not occur when an SEA makes a subgrant award to an LEA. Obligation of Reading First funds only occurs when they are committed to specific activities.

J. COORDINATION WITH OTHER PROGRAMS

J-1. How does Reading First fit with other Federal programs and initiatives that support reading instruction?

The explicit goal of the No Child Left Behind Act is to dramatically improve the achievement of students across the country. Reading First, the academic cornerstone of the No Child Left Behind Act, focuses attention on the most critical element of reaching this goal: ensuring that students know how to read well by the end of third grade. Through Reading First, States and local educational agencies can leverage funds from other Federal programs, particularly Title I, to improve reading instruction for all students. Although Reading First subgrants will only be available to targeted LEAs, State educational agencies will have a significant amount of funds available to provide statewide leadership and professional development in the application and expansion of scientifically based reading research to improve reading instruction. This State leadership supported by Reading First should coordinate and align the use of funds from other Federal programs that focus on improving reading achievement.

J-2. What is the relationship between Reading First and Early Reading First?

The goal of Early Reading First is to prepare children to enter kindergarten truly ready to learn to read, i.e., with the necessary skills for reading success. Early Reading First will focus its grants on proven programs with coherent skill-based instruction. Reading First K-3 classrooms are the preferred and most logical next step for eventual Early Reading First graduates, and the Department encourages SEAs and LEAs to coordinate their Early Reading First and Reading First activities.

J-3. How does Reading First coordinate with a Title I schoolwide plan or a Title I school improvement plan?

All Title I schools that operate schoolwide programs must implement a schoolwide plan. Title I “schoolwides” that receive Reading First subgrants will need to coordinate and integrate their Reading First activities with this plan. Reading First activities can help focus schoolwide plans on the critical goal of improving reading achievement. Title I schoolwides that receive Reading First subgrants must meet all the purposes of Reading First.

Similarly, all schools identified for improvement under Title I must implement a school improvement plan. Schools identified for improvement that receive Reading First subgrants must coordinate and integrate their Reading First activities with this plan and must meet all the purposes of Reading First.

K. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

K-1. Will technical assistance be available to State educational agencies in preparing their Reading First applications?

Yes. Extensive technical assistance will be available to State educational agencies that request assistance as they prepare their Reading First applications. The Department is currently contracting with entities with varied expertise and experience in applying scientifically based reading research to improve reading instruction to provide this support and assistance. The Department will contact SEAs directly with more information on this assistance.

K-2. What technical assistance will be provided to State educational agencies, local educational agencies and schools related to the implementation of Reading First?

An extensive network of technical assistance will be available to support the implementation of Reading First. The Department will contract with entities with experience and expertise related to the application of scientifically based reading research to improve reading instruction and achievement to provide support to State educational agencies. This technical assistance will be multi-faceted and will incorporate a variety of venues and approaches.

Much of this technical assistance will focus on building State capacity to implement Reading First and to support schools across the State as they implement programs and strategies to improve reading achievement that are based on scientifically based reading research. Through the Reading First program, States will have a significant amount of funds for their use in providing professional development and technical assistance to local educational agencies and schools.

In addition, monitoring of State implementation of Reading First will occur as a distinct activity within this network. The Department plans to monitor closely and hold States accountable for their implementation of Reading First and the progress they make in improving student achievement in reading.

K-3. In what other ways is the Federal government providing assistance and information to State educational agencies, local educational agencies and schools related to Reading First?

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), in collaboration with the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development, will disseminate information on scientifically based reading research pertaining to children, youth and adults. NIFL will also identify and disseminate information about schools, local educational agencies and State educational agencies that have developed and implemented effective classroom reading programs that meet the requirements of Reading First.

NIFL will support the continued identification and dissemination of information on reading programs that contain the essential components of reading instruction as supported by scientifically based reading research that can lead to improved reading outcomes for children, youth, and adults. This will include information identified through the external evaluation and review processes of the Reading First program.

K-4. How can a local educational agency or school obtain information about reading programs based on scientifically based reading research?

Consumer guides will be identified that will provide information on reading programs based on scientifically based reading research. Additionally, there are various instruments that can provide criteria for assessing the quality of a particular reading program. These instruments provide methods to ascertain whether a program meets the requirements of scientifically based reading research, and whether it is a comprehensive, supplemental or intervention program.

Another publication with useful information is *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*. This publication can be ordered by contacting the National Institute for Literacy at ED Pubs at 1-800-228-8813 (phone), 301-430-1244 (fax) or EdPubOrders@aspensys.com. It is available online at: www.nifl.gov.

L. NATIONAL EVALUATION

L-1. What are the Department's plans for the national evaluation of Reading First?

The Department will contract with an independent external organization to coordinate and conduct a five-year, quantitative evaluation of the Reading First program. This rigorous, scientifically valid evaluation will be designed to

identify the effects of specific Reading First activities carried out by State educational agencies and local educational agencies on improving reading instruction and to take into account factors influencing student performance that are not controlled by teachers or educational administrators. The evaluation will include:

1. **Essential components of reading instruction** -- an analysis of the relationship between each of the essential components of reading instruction and overall reading proficiency
2. **Assessment tools** -- an analysis of whether the assessment tools used by SEAs and LEAs measure the essential components of reading instruction
3. **State reading standards** -- an analysis of how State reading standards correlate with the essential components of reading instruction
4. **Targeted assistance grants** -- an analysis of whether the receipt of a targeted assistance grant under section 1204 results in an increase in the number of children who read proficiently
5. **Instructional materials** -- A measurement of the extent to which specific instructional materials improve reading proficiency
6. **Identifying reading deficiencies** -- a measurement of the extent to which specific screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based instructional reading assessments assist teachers in identifying specific reading deficiencies
7. **Professional Development** -- a measurement of the extent to which professional development programs implemented by SEAs using Reading First funds improve reading instruction
8. **Pre-service preparation** -- a measurement of how well prepared students entering the teaching profession are to teach the essential components of reading instruction
9. **Student interest in reading** -- an analysis of changes in students' interest in reading and time spent reading outside of school
10. **Additional information** -- any other pertinent analysis or measurement as determined by the Secretary.

The national evaluation of the Reading First program will also examine the impact of Reading First on students' referral to and eligibility for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, based on difficulties learning to read.

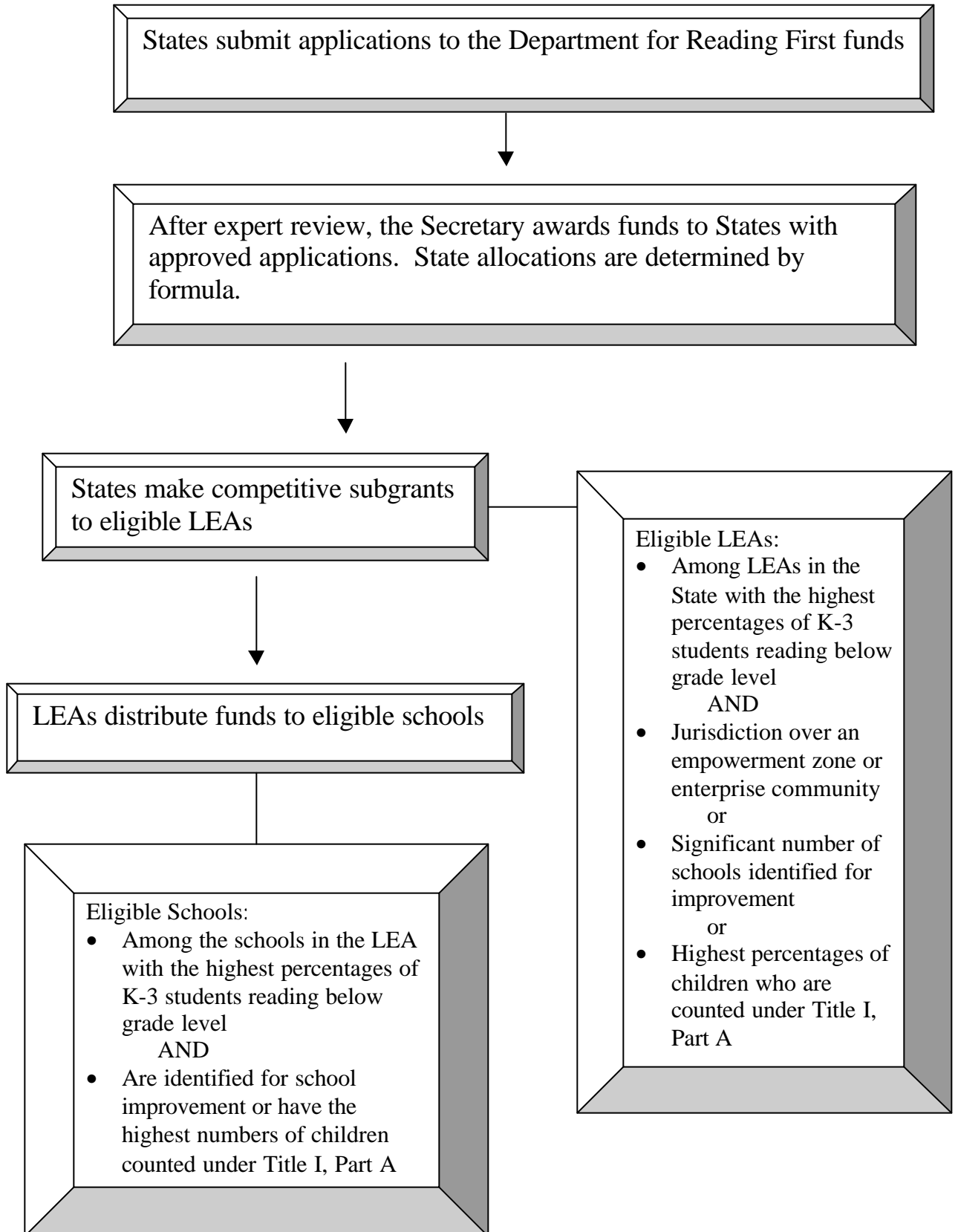
The Department will provide the findings of the national evaluation of the Reading First program to State educational agencies and local educational agencies on a periodic basis for their use in program improvement.

M. MISCELLANEOUS

M-1. What portions of the Education Department's General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) apply to Reading First?

The EDGAR provisions applicable to the Reading First program are Part 76 (State-Administered Programs), Part 77 (Definitions), Part 80 (Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments), Part 82 (New Restrictions on Lobbying) and Part 85 (Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement) and Governmentwide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Grants)).

Appendix A --Flow of Reading First Funds



Appendix B -- Key Findings from Scientifically Based Research on the Essential Components of Reading Instruction

Component of Reading Instruction	Definition	Key Findings
1. Phonemic Awareness	The ability to hear, identify and manipulate the individual sounds, or phonemes, in spoken words.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonemic awareness can be taught and learned. • Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to read. • Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to spell. • Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when children are taught to manipulate phonemes by using the letters of the alphabet. • Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when it focuses on only on or two types of phoneme manipulation, rather than several types.
2. Phonics	The understanding that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes, the sounds of spoken language, and graphemes, the letters and spelling that represent those sounds in written language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is more effective than non-systematic or no phonics instruction. • Systematic and explicit phonics instruction significantly improves kindergarten and first-grade children’s word recognition and spelling. • Systematic and explicit phonics instruction significantly improves children’s reading comprehension.

Component of Reading Instruction	Definition	Key Findings
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is effective for children from various social and economic levels. • Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is particularly beneficial for children who are having difficulty learning to read and who are at risk for developing future reading problems. • Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is most effective when introduced early. • Phonics instruction is not an entire reading program for beginning readers.
<p>3. Vocabulary Development</p>	<p>Development of stored information about the meanings and pronunciation of words necessary for communication. There are four types of vocabulary:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. listening vocabulary – the words needed to understand what is heard b. speaking vocabulary – the words used when speaking c. reading vocabulary – the words needed to understand what is read d. writing vocabulary – the words used in writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children learn the meanings of most words indirectly, through everyday experiences with oral and written language. • Some vocabulary must be taught directly.

<p align="center">Component of Reading Instruction</p>	<p align="center">Definition</p>	<p align="center">Key Findings</p>
<p>4. Reading fluency</p>	<p>The ability to read text accurately and quickly</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated and monitored oral reading improves reading fluency and overall reading achievement. • No research evidence is available currently to confirm that instructional time spent on silent, independent reading with minimal guidance and feedback improves reading fluency and overall reading achievement.
<p>5. Reading Comprehension Strategies</p>	<p>Strategies for understanding, remembering and communicating with others about what has been read</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text comprehension can be improved by instruction that helps readers use specific comprehension strategies. • Students can be taught to use comprehension strategies.

**Appendix C -- Using Scientifically Based Reading Research
to Evaluate Reading Program Effectiveness**

Criteria	Meets Rigorous Standard
1. Use of rigorous, systematic and empirical evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program has a solid theoretical or research foundation that is grounded in the scientific literature. • Program effectiveness has been shown through an experimental design that includes experimental and control groups created through random assignment or carefully matched comparison groups. • Program effectiveness has been demonstrated through research that clearly describes how, by whom, and on whom the research was conducted.
2. Adequacy of the data analyses to test the stated hypotheses and justify the conclusions drawn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research that demonstrates program effectiveness was designed to minimize alternative explanations, such as through a series of experiments that consistently support a given theory while collectively eliminating the most important competing explanations. • The overall conclusions of program effectiveness are consistent with research observations. • Research that demonstrates program effectiveness presents convincing documentation that the observed results were the result of the intervention. • Research that demonstrates program effectiveness clearly defines the population studied (student demographics such as age and poverty level, as well as cognitive, academic and behavioral characteristics; school attributes such as grade levels, size and racial, ethnic and language minority composition). • Research that demonstrates program effectiveness clearly describes to whom the findings can be generalized. • Research that demonstrates program effectiveness provides a full description of outcome measures.

Criteria	Meets Rigorous Standard
<p>3. Reliance on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gains in student reading achievement have been sustained over time. • Gains in student reading achievement have been confirmed through independent, third-party evaluation. • Program effectiveness has been demonstrated through multiple investigators in numerous locations. • Research that demonstrates program effectiveness describes the program in sufficient detail to allow for replicability. • Research that demonstrates program effectiveness explain how instructional fidelity was ensured.
<p>4. Acceptance by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective and scientific review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unbiased individuals who were not part of the study have carefully reviewed the research that demonstrates program effectiveness. • Program effectiveness findings have been subjected to external scrutiny and verification.

Appendix D – Definitions

1. **Eligible Local Educational Agency** – A local educational agency that is:
 - a. Among the local educational agencies in the State with the highest numbers or percentages of students in kindergarten through grade 3 reading below grade level, based on the most currently available data; and
 - b. The LEA has jurisdiction over at least one of the following:
 - i. A geographic area that includes an area designated as an empowerment zone or an enterprise community under part I of subchapter U of chapter 1 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986;
 - ii. A significant number or percentage of schools that are identified for school improvement under section 1116(b); or
 - iii. The highest numbers or percentages of children who are counted under section 1124(c), in comparison to other local educational agencies in the State.
2. **Eligible Professional Development Provider** – A provider of professional development in reading instruction to teachers, including special education teachers, that is based on scientifically based reading research.
3. **Essential Components of Reading Instruction** – Explicit and systematic instruction in:
 - a. Phonemic awareness
 - b. Phonics
 - c. Vocabulary development
 - d. Reading fluency, including oral reading skills
 - e. Reading comprehension strategies
4. **Instructional Staff** – Individuals who have responsibility for teaching children to read. This includes principals, teachers, library school media specialists, teachers of academic subjects other than reading, and other individuals who have responsibility for assisting children to learn to read.

5. **Reading** – A complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires all of the following:
 - a. The skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes, or speech sounds, are connected to print
 - b. The ability to decode unfamiliar words
 - c. The ability to read fluently
 - d. Sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension
 - e. The development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print
 - f. The development and maintenance of a motivation to read

6. **Scientifically Based Reading Research** – Research that applies rigorous, systematic and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties. This includes research that:
 - a. Employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
 - b. Involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;
 - c. Relies on measurements or observational methods that provide valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations;
 - d. Has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective and scientific review.

7. **Screening, Diagnostic and Classroom-Based Instructional Reading Assessments** –
 - a. **Screening Reading Assessment** – An assessment that is valid, reliable and based on scientifically based reading research. It is a brief procedure designed as a first step in identifying children who may be at high risk for

delayed development or academic failure and in need of further diagnosis of their need for special services or additional reading instruction.

- b. **Diagnostic Reading Assessment** – An assessment that is valid, reliable and based on scientifically based reading research. It is used for the following purposes:
 - i. identifying a child’s specific areas of strengths and weaknesses so that the child has learned to read by the end of grade 3
 - ii. determining any difficulties that a child may have in learning to read and the potential cause of such difficulties
 - iii. helping to determine possible reading intervention strategies and related special needs

- c. **Classroom-Based Instructional Reading Assessment** – An assessment that evaluates children’s learning based on systematic observations by teachers of children performing academic tasks that are part of their daily classroom experience and is used to improve instruction in reading, including classroom instruction.

Appendix E – References

Information on obtaining these resources is provided below. Electronic links are available at: <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/read/edpicks.jhtml?src=ln>.

- *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read, Kindergarten through Grade 3*
September 2001

This publication was developed by the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) and was funded by the National Institute for Literacy through the Educational Research and Development Center Program. To order this publication, call 1-877-4-ED-PUBS.

- *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read*
April 2000

The National Reading Panel Report outlines the most effective approaches to teaching children to read, the status of the research on reading, and reading instructional practices that are ready to be used by teachers in classrooms. Both the report and the congressional testimony are available on line and in hard copy.

- *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*
December 1998

This landmark 1998 report of the National Research Council synthesizes the wealth of research on early reading development. It provides an integrated picture of how reading develops and how reading instruction should proceed. This book includes recommendations for practice and further research. Hardcover copies are available from the National Academy Press by calling 1-800-624-6242. Each book costs \$35.95 plus shipping and handling.

- *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success*
1998

This guide, developed by the National Research Council, explains how children learn to read and how adults can help them. It provides ideas for the prevention of reading difficulties in early childhood and the primary grades. Copies are available from the National Academy Press by calling 1-800-624-6242. Each book costs \$14.95 plus shipping and handling.