

---

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding research that supports small group reading instruction over whole group reading instruction in kindergarten through third grade self-contained classrooms. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the ten regional educational laboratories (REL) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on research based education questions.

The information below represents the most rigorous research available. Researchers consider the type of methodology and give priority to research reports that employ well described and thorough methods.

**Question:** *What research supports small group reading instruction and its effectiveness over whole group reading instruction in growing student achievement in kindergarten through third grade self-contained classrooms?*

**Key words and search strings used in the search:** *self-contained classrooms; effective reading instruction; grouping for reading AND students with learning disabilities; small group vs whole group AND reading instruction AND self-contained classrooms OR learning disabilities*

**Note:** We did not find any rigorous studies specific to this question; however, some related research citations are provided below.

**Search databases and websites:**

1. ERIC: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>
2. JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/action/showAdvancedSearch>
3. Google Scholar: [www.google.com/scholar](http://www.google.com/scholar)
4. Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Resources: <http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/>
5. What Works Clearinghouse: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

**Citations Retrieved: (NOTE: Abstracts and executive summaries are copied directly from the reports when possible to ensure accuracy):**

Ahlgrim-Delzell, L., & Rivera, C. A. (2015). A content comparison of literacy lessons from 2004 to 2010 for students with moderate and severe intellectual disability. *Exceptionality*, 23(4), 258–269. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1079162>

**Abstract/Summary:** Mandates such as No Child Left Behind (2001) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) shifted the emphasis of instruction to include

---

skills that access the general curriculum for students with moderate to severe intellectual disability. The purpose of this study was to describe changes in literacy instruction of teachers who participated in literacy research using secondary data analysis of instructional videos from 2004 to 2010. Results from the study suggest that teachers in 2004 focused on fewer components of reading that did not include phonemic awareness or phonics than teachers in 2010. Other changes in instruction included use of systematic instruction, grade-appropriate materials, and structure of literacy lessons.

Elbaum B., Vaughn, S., Hughes, M., & Moody, S. W. (1999). Grouping practices and reading outcomes for students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 65(3), 399-415.  
<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ593065>

**Abstract/Summary:** Examines the relationship between reading outcomes and grouping practices of students with disabilities in the United States. Comparison between grouping formats and whole class instruction; Effectiveness of peer tutoring; Impact of grouping format on reading for students with disabilities.

Moody, S. W., Vaughn, S., & Schumm, J. S. (1997). Instructional grouping for reading. *Remedial and Special Education*, 18(6), 347-356. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ559525>

**Abstract/Summary:** Individual and focus group interviews with 49 third-grade regular and special education teachers revealed that teachers value control over their decisions on grouping for reading instruction. Regular teachers reported they preferred whole class and mixed ability grouping arrangements for social and academic reasons, whereas special educators supported same-ability grouping strategies. (DB)

Spector, J. E., & Cavanaugh, B. J. (2015). The conditions of beginning reading instruction for students with autism spectrum disorder. *Remedial and Special Education*, 36(6), 337-346.  
<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1079392>

**Abstract/Summary:** A disproportionate number of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are below grade level in reading. This trend may be due in part to characteristics of the disability, but it may also reflect lack of access to the instructional conditions needed for success in beginning reading. In this study, we surveyed special education teachers to investigate the conditions of reading instruction for K-3 students with ASD. Consistent with recommendations regarding beginning reading, teachers (n = 66) indicated that the vast majority of students with ASD (n = 226) participated in daily reading instruction and received more comprehensive instruction than the sight word approach that has been used in the past. Findings of concern included frequency of use of paraprofessionals to provide primary

---

instruction, teachers' relatively low self-efficacy for teaching reading to students with ASD, and provision of less than the recommended instructional time for K-3 reading.

Swanson, E. A., & Vaughn, S. (2010). An observation study of reading instruction provided to elementary students with learning disabilities in the resource room. *Psychology in the Schools*, 47(5), 481–492. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ896145>

**Abstract/Summary:** This study documents the amount and quality of reading instruction provided to second- through fifth-grade students with learning disabilities provided resource-room services. Reading instruction provided by 10 special education resource-room teachers was observed. Findings reveal that teachers and students were on task during instructional time that included phonological awareness, word study, comprehension, reading fluency, and vocabulary instruction of average to high average quality. Although class size was small overall, whole-group instructional delivery was most common. Students made statistically significant gains in oral reading fluency but did not increase their standard scores on measures of comprehension or word reading. (Contains 3 tables.)

Vaughn, S., Hughes, M. T., Moody, S. W., & Elbaum, B. (2001). Instructional grouping for reading for students with LD: Implications for practice. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 36(3), 131–137. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ619744>

**Abstract/Summary:** This article discusses different types of instructional grouping for teaching reading skills to students with learning disabilities, including whole-class instruction, small-group instruction, peer pairing and tutoring, and one-on-one instruction. After discussion of each grouping format, implications for practice are highlighted, particularly practices to meet students' needs in inclusive classrooms. (Contains references.) (Author/CR)

## Referrals

### Organizations:

- National Association of Special Education Teachers: <https://www.naset.org/>
- Council for Exceptional Children: <https://www.cec.sped.org/>
- Florida Center for Reading Research: <http://www.fcrr.org/>
- Vaughn Gross Center for Reading & Language Arts: <http://www.meadowscenter.org/vgc/>
- The IRIS Center: <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/>
- LD Online: <http://www.ldonline.org/index.php>

---

**Federally Funded Resources:**

- Institute of Education Sciences (IES), public search engine available at: <http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/>
- National Center for Special Education Research (NCSE): <https://ies.ed.gov/ncser/>
- What Works Clearinghouse: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

***Disclaimer:***

*This Ask A REL response was developed by REL-SE under Contract ED-IES-12-C-0011 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.*