

Readsters Responds

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Question: What program would you recommend for reading remediation for middle school students?

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The short answer is that there is no one program that will meet all middle school students' reading remediation needs. The selection of an appropriate reading remediation program is dependent on knowing the student's weaknesses and the depth of the weaknesses. This can only be determined by assessment.

Students can, in general, have weaknesses ranging from mild to severe in two areas: decoding and general language abilities. The only way to determine the student's weakness is with targeted reading assessment. A reading comprehension test tells us only if a student has reading difficulties; it does not identify the nature of any difficulties. Once we know that a student has reading comprehension difficulties, we need to assess further to find out the specific weaknesses that are impeding comprehension.

So before we can answer your question about programs, we would need to know what the weaknesses are based on assessment, and the depth of the weaknesses. Unfortunately, observations alone are usually not sufficient to specifically identify what a student's weakness is. It is often assumed that students know how to decode and that a reading problem must be comprehension, especially for students in upper elementary and beyond. However, both our experience and numerous research studies show that many older struggling readers have decoding problems. Thus, it is necessary to appropriately assess whether students have strong decoding skills or not.

For some poor readers decoding is the only issue, so teaching them to decode will raise their comprehension abilities and scores. For other poor readers, weak language skills are the only issue (generally, a much harder problem to remedy than decoding). Yet other students are weak in both decoding and language comprehension and need help in both areas to significantly raise their reading comprehension abilities.

The methods for teaching decoding and language comprehension differ greatly, and students with different weaknesses need vastly different kinds of intervention instruction. Therefore, we recommend that program decisions be based on specific student needs identified through diagnostic assessment.