



May 17, 2005

## Program helps improve reading

By KAYLA COGDILL, *Bismarck Tribune*

Two Bismarck middle schools are taking a new approach to fighting illiteracy. The system has been successful in other states, and in less than five months 174 students with reading problems at Wachter and Horizon middle schools have increased an average of two reading grade levels. Some have increased significantly more.

The new program, Read Right, reteaches the brain how to read.

Reading problems result when the brain's neural network that guides the reading process has an error. To fix the problem, the brain must be remodeled. Read Right can remodel the brain in a process that is simple for the reader and results are established quickly, according to the program's founder.

Reading, an every day function, is not a reality for many people. Currently, 85 million adults in the United States, that's almost 35 percent of the population, have low or very low literacy skills.

The future doesn't look promising. The National Center for Education statistics in 2003 reported 68 percent of the nation's fourth-graders are reading below proficient. The same report shows that the problem extends throughout education with 64 percent of 12th-graders never reading at their grade level.

However, some school officials believe they have found a solution for illiteracy.

"It (Read Right) works, it just works," said Rudy Steidl, principal at Horizon. "The students aren't just reading the words, they are comprehending (the text). Most students only read what they have to get by in school. Then they become adults that are just average readers, not good readers. Now they have a better chance to succeed in school and in life."

### How it works

Students are selected for the program based on various test results and teacher recommendations. The students then take an assessment test to determine their reading level. After the reading level is determined students are placed within six different categories. The purpose is to place the child at a reading level they are comfortable with, but are still challenged.

The students begin cycling, which is listening to a tape playing each paragraph. The student then reads the paragraph to themselves and then out loud to a tutor. If the student reads the paragraph well they move on to the next one. If not, the process starts over.

The process allows the reader to artificially experience excellence in reading. Therefore, causing the sub-conscious brain to know what effective reading feels like. The experience sends a positive message to the brain and the readers know they are capable of achieving excellent reading. The process then becomes comfortable and natural for the brain and the reader can understand the text.

After the tutor determines the reader has achieved excellent reading standards, they advance to the next reading level until they are proficient at their grade level.

On average, 18 to 20 hours of tutoring is needed for a student to advance to the next reading level. Tutoring is only an hour a day.

### It's for everyone

Students in the Read Right program vary greatly. They range from straight A students, ADHD students, mentally handicapped students and others.

"I tell my students 90 percent of the school could benefit from this," said Cara Emerson, a Read Right tutor at Horizon. "Already three students have graduated from the program and the other students realize that being here is not such a bad thing. I've seen their confidence level go up since they are reading better. They carry their heads higher in the hallways."

Students are allowed to participate in the program on a voluntary basis. Currently there are 76 students in the program and 11 students waiting to get in at Horizon and 83 students in the program and two waiting to get in at Wachter.

The program is not a special education program, and students must miss one of their regular classes to participate.

The Insider's perspective

For some students, the program feels like it is special education, that is until they see the results.

Chad LaCoe, a ninth-grader at Wachter is a prime example. At first he didn't want to be in the program. He never liked reading and the idea of spending an hour a day in school focusing on reading wasn't exactly exciting.

When Chad started in January he was reading at a second-grade level. Now he is reading at his grade level, but hasn't quite graduated from the program.

For Chad, school has gotten a little easier and taking tests are not a problem. He is proud of his accomplishments and even volunteers to read out loud in class -- something he would have never done before.

Some of the students in the program said they didn't even know they had a reading problem until they were invited into the program. Other students didn't care that they had a reading problem.

"When you have a 15-year-old that doesn't want to be here, and they can only read a book that is second-grade level, that really hurts their ego," said Steidl. "They don't want their friends to know. But when they can read a second-grade book and understand it we want them to grow and be able to read a ninth-grade sociology book and understand that."

One thing tutors have noticed about some students in Read Right is their behavioral change. Students that struggle to read often act out or don't pay attention in class. But when they enter the Read Right room, they are focused and ready to work.

Yet, how do students who can only read at the second-grade level end up in the ninth-grade?

"People don't know how to eliminate reading problems," said Dee Tadlock, creator of Read Right. "It isn't realistic to keep someone in the second grade until they are 22 because they can't read. You just can't hold them back forever."

Up and running

Learning to read does come with a price tag. The Bismarck School District became interested in the program after learning about its success. The school district received grants to cover the \$68,800 startup at each school. The upfront costs are high, school administration said, but pay off in the long run.

Read Right trainers train up to four individuals to become tutors. Each tutor has four students. After about two to three years, the tutors can then train other people to become tutors. Also included in the price is a 900-book library, off-site support, monthly progress reports, equipment, graduation kits and other items.

Next year, more tutors will be added to Wachter and Horizon, and Simle Middle School also will have Read Right. Fort Yates and Standing Rock middle schools and high schools also are getting the program.

The demand is even high at the Adult Learning Center and elementary schools in Bismarck after they have seen the results in the two middle schools.

The school district is not able to put Read Right in all the schools because of limited funding.

"What is the cost of people not being able to read? It is costly to the person and costly to society. You've got to weigh those factors and to me it is money well spent," said Steidl.

(Reach reporter Kayla Cogdill at 250-8251 or [kaylacogdill@bismarcktribune.net](mailto:kaylacogdill@bismarcktribune.net).)