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To: info@whatworks.ed.gov
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From: keiths@ori.org

Message: Dear WWC,

I am writing today about the recent review of Reading Mastery for students with learning disabilities, which I found to be quite problematic. I have some experience with WWC and Reading Mastery (RM). The review of Gunn, Biglan, Smolkowski, and Ary (2000), which met WWC evidence standards, led the WWC to recommend RM for English learners. Indeed, it was one of the top-rated programs. Because of the very different results from the review of RM for students with learning disabilities, I took a closer look.

While talking about this report with my colleagues at the National Institute for Direct Instruction as well as other researchers, I also discovered some additional discrepancies with the WWC procedures. In an effort to improve the process, I have been encouraged by everyone to forward my concerns to you. Below I raise my concerns with the RM review as well as issues that may lead to inconsistent and potentially inadequate reviews of other programs.

The review of RM for students with learning disabilities suffers from serious flaws. In particular, the report relies on two studies. Cooke et al (2004) compares RM to its very similar sister program, Horizons. Herrera et al. (1997) compares RM to a comparison condition that included RM plus a supplemental program called the Stabilized Learning System (SLS). The review concluded that RM did not perform better than Horizons. This is what one would expect given that they are highly aligned and designed by the same people. The second paper is not a valid comparison, as it compares RM to RM plus SLS and erroneously concludes that RM may have potentially negative effects.

If RM turns out to be an effective way to teach children with learning disabilities and if schools, instead, turn to less effective programs, the WWC is then actively producing change toward less effective programs in schools. I believe RM is an effective instructional program. In our research on RM, we included many more students than English learners. The students with the lowest performance on literacy and preliteracy and exposed to RM made either equal or greater gains than control students (see Gunn, Smolkowski, Biglan, Black, & Blair, 2005, in J. of Special Education). Our poor readers were selected because they performed in the bottom 15% of students in their schools, and although we did not classify students by disability status, 17.1% of our total sample either received special education or Chapter services for reading. When we examined poor-reader status as a moderator, we found that our poor readers in the RM condition made greater gains than control students. The difference between conditions was either the same or greater than that for students who began the year below grade level but were not designated as poor readers. This appeared to be true regardless of language status. From our research with RM, then, it appears that it is likely an effective approach, yet WWC is currently recommending to educators nationwide that they remove the program from their shelves based on a flawed review.

The WWC RM report appeared to miss many papers on the RM. Granted, not all of them would qualify for this review, but list of references at the end of the review is missing numerous papers. Books such as Engelmann and Carnine's (2011) *Could John Stuart Mill have Saved Our Schools* and Adams and Engelmann's (1996) *Research on Direct Instruction* include many papers not cited in the literature reviewed. As I mentioned, not all of those would meet criteria for evaluation, but the reference list on their page 8 and 9 should have included more papers.

The limited search for papers raises another question. When I spoke with my

