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## OU Reading Recovery Center continues to expand literacy efforts

On a brisk November morning, just a few miles down the road from Oakland University's Rochester campus, **Walton Charter Academy** bustles with bright-eyed, enthusiastic children learning time-honored lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic. Of the 85 first-grade students who attend the school – nestled along Walton Boulevard in Pontiac – nearly a third come from households where English is not the primary language.

The students also face economic hurdles, with more than 80 percent qualifying for free or reduced-price school lunches. These obstacles can present a steep learning curve for students when it comes to mastering literacy skills.

Oakland University's Reading Recovery Center – the only center of its kind in Michigan – is part of an ongoing effort to help students gain the skills needed for long-term success. The Center was recently awarded a grant from the Reading Recovery Council of North America that is being used to train 18 Michigan teachers in Reading Recovery – two from Walton and others from schools in Detroit and Grand Blanc. The total award is worth more than \$53,000, with each teacher receiving \$1,000 for tuition costs and \$1,800 in books and material use with Reading Recovery students.

According to Dr. Mary Lose, director of OU's Reading Recovery Center, grant funding has played a key role in helping the center implement and expand Reading Recovery efforts in schools around the state.

"We've been very successful in obtaining grant support over the past several years," said Dr. Lose. "This latest grant will make an enormous difference in the lives of about 180 Reading Recovery students this year alone and almost 1,000 Reading Recovery children in the next five years. And very important is the impact the teachers' new learning will have on their classroom and small group instruction with the children they teach every day in their other instructional roles."

### Teachers in training

Under the grant, Walton teachers Pamela Haines and Stephanie Jacobson are training to become certified in Reading Recovery, a research-based initiative that aims to identify and assist first-grade children who are struggling to read. With an emphasis on early intervention, Reading Recovery has helped more than 2 million at-risk children nationwide reach first-grade reading levels.

Haines and Jacobson began Reading Recovery training in August. They attend weekly classes at OU, which are led by OU alumna Lynn Newmyer, a certified Reading Recovery teacher leader. The teachers learn about Reading Recovery pedagogy with other Reading Recovery trainees and observe each other teaching one-on-one reading lessons to under-performing first-graders.

In addition, the teachers receive constructive feedback on their teaching performance.

"It's a really supportive environment where teachers can learn from each other," said Haines, who has taught at Walton since 2007. "The program teaches theory and practical knowledge related to literacy learning for the lowest-performing students and can be used with other students as well."



*Walton teacher Stephanie Jacobson works with a first-grade Reading Recovery ESL student.*



*Walton teacher Pamela Haines works with a first-grade Reading Recovery student.*

Along with their shared interest in Reading Recovery, Haines and Jacobson are both graduates of OU. Both are excited to be back on campus with the goal of helping at-risk students read at or above grade level.

“I wanted to become part of Reading Recovery because it’s a research-based intervention that uses specific strategies to teach students not only how to read, but read with meaning,” said Jacobson, who works at the school as an academic specialist. “My students not only gain skills to make them better readers, but also develop a love of reading.”

Haines added, “This is a great opportunity to give Walton students the support they need to become successful readers. Reading is the basis for all learning, so it’s critical to reach students early and give them a foundation for lifelong success.”

Haines spends half her workday teaching Reading Recovery and the other half teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). Those two areas often intersect as ESL students are faced with unique challenges when learning to read. Reading Recovery helps supplement the instruction they receive in the classroom.



*From Left: Mary Lose, Annie Muller, Pamela Haines, Stephanie Jacobson, Laura Westlake, Shannon Joseph and Walton Principal Mc Boersma.*

“Although some ESL students may be able to communicate socially in English, expressing academic language can prove to be a challenge,” Haines said, noting that six of Walton’s 20 current Reading Recovery students are also ESL students. “Students with limited vocabularies have more opportunities with the English language. Reading Recovery is another tool to support their learning.”

Reading Recovery sessions run about half an hour and consist of reading and writing activities designed to strengthen each student’s word recognition, vocabulary, reading fluency and self-monitoring skills. Students read aloud from a wide range of leveled books. At first, they sometimes place their finger under each word as they move across the page and later read more rapidly at increasing text levels.

They also write a sentence, and the teacher cuts the sentence into individual words or word parts that the student must put back together.

“This helps the student further notice detail in print and understand how the individual parts of a sentence and its words fit together, somewhat like putting a puzzle together,” Haines said.

## **Forward progress**

This most recent Reading Recovery grant builds on past efforts to boost literacy at Walton. In 2014, three Walton teachers – Annie Muller, Laura Westlake and Shannon Joseph – were certified in Reading Recovery under a federal grant awarded to OU’s Reading Recovery Center. The results were encouraging, Haines said. By the end of the 2014-2015 school year, more than 70 percent of the school’s Reading Recovery students were reading at or above grade level. The rest of the children made progress much greater than initially projected given their very low scores at the start of the school year.

Jacobson said she has seen tremendous progress in her students’ reading ability since the start of the current school year.

“They are able to notice their mistakes and self-correct before moving on,” Jacobson said. “They’re taking positive steps toward becoming proficient readers all within a very short time. They’re excited to come to school each day and look forward to reading and writing. It’s really changed these students’ outlook on school.”

OU is one of only 18 universities in the U.S. to serve as a Reading Recovery training center. Since its founding in 1991, the Center has served more than 107,000 first-grade children throughout Michigan and more than 1,400 Michigan teachers have been trained in Reading Recovery. In the past decade, the Center has obtained more than \$4.5 million in grants to support the work of Reading Recovery in Michigan.

For more on OU’s Reading Recovery Center, visit [oakland.edu/readingrecovery](http://oakland.edu/readingrecovery).